

# DEISM REVEALED.

OR, THE

## Attack on CHRISTIANITY

CANDIDLY REVIEWED

In its real MERITS, as they stand in the  
celebrated Writings of

Lord HERBERT,  
Lord SHAFTESBURY,  
HOBBS,  
TOLAND,  
TINDAL,  
COLLINS,

MANDEVILLE,  
DODWELL,  
WOOLSTON,  
MORGAN,  
CHUBB,  
And others.

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The SECOND EDITION. With Amendments.

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Ἀρχαῖος μὲν ἔν τις λόγος καὶ πατέρις ἐστὶ πᾶσιν ἀν-  
θρώποις, ὡς ἐκ Θεῶ τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ Θεῶ ἡμῖν συνέστηκεν·  
ἐδημία δὲ φύσις αὐτὴ καθ' ἑαυτὴν αὐτάρκης ἐνημερωθεῖσα  
τῆς ἐκ τέττε σωτηρίας. Aristot. de Mundo.

——— Ἀλλ' ἐδ' ἂν διδάξειεν, εἰ μὴ Θεὸς ὑπογοῖτο.  
Plato in Epinom.

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V O L. II.

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L O N D O N :

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# DEISM REVEALED

OR THE

ALPHA OF CHRISTIANITY

CAMPBELL REVEALED

In his testimony, & the history of the  
Christianity of the world.

By the Rev. Mr. Campbell, &c.  
Author of "The Christian's Guide," &c.  
London: Printed by J. & W. T. & Co. 1801.





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# OPHIOMACHES:

OR,

## DEISM Revealed.

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### DIALOGUE V.

DECHAINED,  
TEMPLETON,

CUNNINGHAM,  
SHEPHERD.

*Dechaine.* **W**HAT a weakness was it in me to be prevailed on by *Templeton* to go to church yesterday, where I heard what I suppose I must be obliged to hear over again to-day; a set of notions and opinions, disagreeable enough in themselves, and made still more so by a dull defence! Surely, once had been enough in all conscience for the patience of the oldest sniveller in the parish.

*Shep.* You need not tell us, Sir, how insignificant and unentertaining all discourses on such subjects must be to a Gentleman, who is not only wiser than an human teacher, but also too knowing to need any instructions even from God. Having already shewn you think so, it is now time to shew, that God thought so too, both in respect to yourself, and mankind in general, to whom nature and education may have been less liberal. The last article of your creed, which is negative, consists in the denial of all revelation; but as I own there have been many pretended revelations imposed on the credulous world, I shall only desire you to give your reasons for rejecting the Christian.



*Dech.* That I shall do, in order as they occur to me: and altho' the strongest objection against revelation arises from the universal clearness of the natural religion and law, which, with all you have said, you have not been able to disparage, and which therefore makes a revealed one utterly needless; yet, as more than enough hath been already said on that topic, under the consideration of the former articles in our creed, I shall wave it for the future; and only insist on such arguments against the revelation you speak of, as arise intirely from itself. In the first place, tho' I cannot, with Mr. *Cbubb*, think it utterly impossible for any man to know whether he himself is actually inspired by God, yet I am of opinion there must be too much obscurity and uncertainty in all the methods, by which revelations are said to have been conveyed, such as dreams, visions, voices, to be relied on in an affair of sufficient importance to make a preternatural intercourse between the Divine and human nature necessary. Enthusiasts, who are prompted only by a wild imagination, and persons in a phrensy, or the raving fit of a fever, are as fully satisfied of the reality of the things represented to them, and convinced of the truth and soundness of their own notions, as those are, whose senses are clear and perfect, and whose reason is in its full vigour. This considered, I am much at a loss to conceive how the prophets and apostles, as you call them, could have been so confident, which I believe they were, that God had in reality made any revelation to them; or, at least, how others can be sure he did; since those prophets and apostles have not told us by what means their conviction was wrought in them. Had this been done, we might have formed some judgment of the matter, and seen more clearly, than we can at present, whether their inspirations carried higher marks of truth and reality, than the imaginations of enthusiasts or madmen.

*Shep.* You cannot surely think it impossible, that God, who hath given us senses and reason, by which certain knowledge in some things is conveyed to us, may by other means communicate as certain a knowledge of other things, not perceivable by the ordinary inlets to knowledge.

*Dech.*

*Dech.* This does not seem to be impossible.

*Shep.* But if those other means are preternatural, the person who is actually inspired by God, can never communicate to uninspired persons an adequate idea of such means, because they are destitute of all inlets to knowledge, but the natural. Hence it comes, that altho' some men may, by the power of God, be rightly convinced their inspirations come immediately from him, so, I mean, as clearly to distinguish them from all imaginary or enthusiastic convictions; yet they cannot make others sensible of the means, by which the Divine Spirit works this conviction and distinction in themselves.

*Dech.* Their inspirations, therefore, can be of no use but to themselves; because they cannot prove to others, that they are inspired.

*Shep.* Altho' they cannot prove this by conveying into the minds of others a perfect idea of the very means, by which the inspiration or revelation is communicated to them, yet they can do as well; for they can clearly prove by miracles, that such communication hath been actually made to them; they can prove it also by the completion of events foretold. A blind man can never be made to conceive the means by which a seeing person discovers objects and distances that lie beyond the reach of his hand or staff: yet he can be easily and sufficiently convinced, that others have some sense or faculty, by which the aforementioned conceptions, so inconceivable to him, are actually performed.

*Temp.* It is surely very conceivable, that God may as easily convey to any one the genuine signs of Divine revelation, as the thing itself.

*Dech.* Your conception is a good deal more pregnant than mine, who am not very ready at conceiving things I can form no idea of.

*Shep.* But you have no mean talent at conceiving difficulties, or impossibilities, in those very things, whereof you have no ideas.

*Dech.* Truth, for ought I know, may be of either side, in a question so metaphysical; and therefore we will detain ourselves no longer with it. But I am still more at a loss to imagine how the inspired person can convince

another, that he is charged with a message from God. I know miracles have been much insisted on, as a sufficient means for this end. But I know, at the same time, that there are secrets in nature, by which effects may be produced, which, to persons unacquainted with those effects, may seem to be above the powers of nature. There may be also, and you Christians insist there are, spirits of an evil disposition; and yet so far superior to mankind in knowledge and power, that it is impossible for us to know what wonders they can, or cannot perform. The *Jews* in Christ's time, it seems, thought so; and ascribed his miracles to the malice and power of such beings. Now if there be not some sure and certain method fixed between the worker and the spectator of a miracle, by which the former may be able to satisfy the latter, that what he does is the effect of Divine power, and not of natural or supernatural magic, I cannot see how any mission can be proved to be divine by the assistance of miracles.

*Shep.* Does not the same natural cause always produce the same natural effects, provided it is attended with the same circumstances, and exerted upon the same, or a like subject?

*Dech.* It does.

*Shep.* These words, therefore, *Be thou whole*, if they ever did heal the sick by their own natural virtue, must always do it, when applied to the same purpose, and under the same circumstances.

*Dech.* Those words have in themselves no power to heal; but an adept may convey thro' the air, or by some other vehicle, unknown to the ignorant, the sanative fume or quality of some powerful drug, which may work some alteration in the sick person, at the same time that the afore-mentioned words are uttered; and this effect, helped out by a strong enthusiastic imagination (for you know the patient always wrought one half of the cure by his own faith, as it was called) may produce a degree of health, sufficient to make a superstitious multitude imagine there is a real miracle in the thing.

*Shep.* It would be hard, I think, to suppose, that an inveterate lameness, or blindness, could be cured, or a person

person four days dead restored to life, by this method, howsoever ingenious it may appear. And it must be granted to be still as unlikely, that a man of common sense would put the proof of his mission from God on an operation so precarious, and depending so mainly upon the unknown disposition of the patient. But to let this pass; such a proceeding can be of no efficacy, when the person who is restored by it, is absent, and beyond the activity of your drug; or dead, and incapable of faith or enthusiasm. The cases of the Centurion's servant, and *Lazarus*, were utterly beyond the power of natural causes; but we could not be as sure, that they were also above the power of evil spirits, if those spirits, either before or since, had ever been able to perform such wonders. We think it impious to ascribe the incommunicable attributes of God to created beings, tho' of the highest dignity and goodness; and how shall we then rob him of his omnipotence, and bestow it on the worst of beings? To create, and give life, are effects of infinite power alone; and to do these with a word, that is, without instruments or means, is to assume the place and power of Almighty God, is to be God indeed. But, granting that evil spirits could by any means give such proofs of their power, would they exert it against themselves? Would Devils employ it to subvert idolatry, and the adoration of Devils? Would they use it in dividing the *Red Sea*, in order to deliver a nation from the very sink of all idolatry, in opening the earth to swallow up the blasphemers of the true God, in cloathing mount *Sinai* with fire and thunder, that a law, enforcing virtue and goodness, might be delivered to the *Israelites* with the greater pomp and authority? But I am amazed how any one can call those evil spirits, to whom he ascribes such acts of goodness, as giving life to the dead, and delivering the miserable from the most melancholy and grievous distempers, in order to establish the most exalted and purest system of piety and virtue.

*Dech.* This way of proving the Divinity of a revelation by miracles, hath, to my apprehension, something very odd and uncouth in it. What connexion, in the nature



of things, is there between a miracle, and a revelation? How can the one be inferred from the other?

*Shep.* That performance, which from the goodness of its tendency, and from its contrariety, or superiority, to the powers of nature, appears evidently to come from God, if accompanied with any doctrine, delivered by the performer, as the dictate of Almighty God, must prove that doctrine to be divine, especially if it is such a doctrine, as reason was of itself unable to investigate, and, now that it is delivered, is unable to prove it inconsistent either with the attributes of God, or the wants of men.

*Dech.* The force of this argument is by no means apparent to me; for the person who is impowered to work the miracle, and charged with a revelation, even granting both to be true in fact, is still free, as well in a moral, as a natural sense; and therefore may pervert, or change, the nature of the revelation, insomuch that he, who believes the revelation to come from God, must depend intirely on the honesty of a man, as weak, fallible, and as easily tempted to dissemble, as himself (*a*).

*Shep.* He who sees the miracle wrought, and is convinced it is performed by the power of God, must at the same time be fully convinced, that the searcher of hearts hath chosen out an honest person to utter his important message; or otherwise he must apprehend, that God may be deceived in the instruments he employs, and disappointed of the great ends he proposes to himself, in bestowing on an improper person the power of working miracles, and singling out an unfaithful messenger to deliver his will to mankind. God, by the miracle, assures the beholder, that whatsoever the worker delivers to him in the name of God, does actually come from God. If therefore he, who sees the miracle wrought, ascribes it to the power of God, he cannot help regarding the message delivered to him in virtue of that miracle, as the voice of God. Besides, he can hardly suppose, that a man, enabled by God to work miracles, could, after such a conviction of the Divine presence and power, prevaricate in a case of so great importance with so awful a Master;

(*a*) *Chubb's Farewel*, sect. 3.

Master; and he can still less suppose, that, if he should once prove so impious and unfaithful, the infinitely wise and good Being would continue to him the power of working miracles to no other end, but the establishment of principles different from, or contrary to, the Divine purpose. Hence it follows, that a series of miracles, truly such, wrought by any preacher, is a full and irresistible demonstration to right reason, that he is a preacher of truth and righteousness.

*Temp.* We must cease to think with reverence of God's truth and wisdom, before we can believe him capable of assisting an impostor with supernatural power.

*Shep.* Nothing can be more evident. Although, however, a real miracle is the highest proof that can be given of a Divine power, and, with reasonable people, is in itself sufficient cause of conviction; yet, as our Blessed Lord had a stiff-necked and unreasonable people to deal with, he wanted not other proofs to support his mission, more peculiarly adapted to the received principles and faith of the *Jews*. Their own prophecies proved him to be the person they expected upon the strength of those very prophecies; and besides, he told them, on many occasions, the most secret thoughts of their own hearts, into which none but God himself could penetrate.

*Dech.* And yet, had the proofs been so very convincing, as you would make them, the *Jews* to a man must all have turned Christians.

*Shep.* But had they been so weak, as you would represent them, few or none among a people so bigotted to their law, their traditions, and their Rabbi's, and so bloated and blinded with the hopes of a mere temporal deliverer, could have been converted. As to those who were not, we know full well what stood in the way of their conversion, what they suffered immediately after, for their wilful opposition to the most irresistible means of conviction, and how wonderfully they, at this day, assist the schemes of Providence, in attesting the truth of a religion they rail at with the greatest bitterness, and wish for nothing so much, as the power to persecute it with the same fury and cruelty as at first.

*Dech.* As to what you said just now in relation to prophecies, I must observe to you, as Mr. *Chubb* hath done, (a) that this species of miracles is unqualified by its own nature to answer your purpose. A prophecy, before it is fulfilled, carries with it no evidence of Divine original or truth, because it is yet uncertain whether it will ever be verified by the event, or not. Further, if the prophecy is obscure in itself, it may be interpreted of various events; and therefore cannot precisely, or certainly, be deemed fulfilled by any event.

*Shep.* A plain or precise prophecy may gain credit, before it is fulfilled, by the more early completion of other prophecies, uttered by the same person, or by miracles, wrought for that purpose, when it was delivered. If by these means it shall once be revered, as a prophecy, it will become the concern of those, to whom it is delivered, to remember or record it. When, in process of time, an event arrives, exactly answering to it, this proves the truth of the prophecy. But altho' the prophecy was in itself figurative or obscure, yet the event may so precisely tally with it, as at once to explain and verify it. A prophecy, whether plain or figurative, being thus proved to be an effect of the Divine foreknowledge, must tend as strongly, as any other miracle, to serve the ends of Providence in uttering such a prophecy. Now, if it was the end or purpose of Providence to instruct and reclaim the world by Christ Jesus, all prophecies concerning Christ, and fulfilled in him, must as effectually prove the Divinity of his mission, as the miracles wrought by him; and to the *Jews* perhaps even more effectually, because, before our Saviour came into the world, they held the prophecies concerning him, in the highest reverence; whereas they generally looked on his person, when he did come, with contempt, as not answerable to their worldly expectations, and of consequence regarded his miracles with proportionable disesteem. I need not observe to you, that the prophecies, delivered by Christ and his Apostles, whether literal or figurative, that have in the subsequent ages been fulfilled, serve to refresh and confirm our faith, in the same manner, and almost in the

[ (a) *Ibidem*, sect. 7.

the same degree, as miracles, wrought in those ages, could have done.

*Temp.* This may be; but why should any prophecy have been obscure? If they were intended for proof and conviction, they ought, I should think, to have been most plain and intelligible.

*Shep.* Many reasons there may have been, known to God, but not to us, for the obscurity of certain prophecies. A prophecy of such an event, as men are neither able to prevent, nor by imposture mimic, may be plain and literal. Accordingly some, relating to our Saviour, whose power was not to be resisted, whose character was not to be assumed by another, and whose preachings, actions, and sufferings, were inimitable, had been delivered, long before he came into the world, in terms so precise and intelligible, as to leave no doubt, in unprejudiced minds, about their meaning. As to the obscurity of other prophecies, it was in all probability intended on set purpose, that nothing but the event might explain or interpret them, lest men should pervert the course of things, as *Julian* in his attempt to rebuild the temple of *Jerusalem* did, in order to frustrate the completion of them; or lest others, as many impostors have done, should have an opportunity of deceiving the world by assuming the characters, and thrusting themselves into the point of time or place, marked out by a too intelligible prophecy.

*Temp.* I must own, were miracles, such as those you speak of, wrought, and such prophecies fulfilled, in my sight, to convince me of doctrines highly reasonable in themselves, and beneficial to the world, I should think myself obliged to resign the most opposite and riveted opinions to them. But I am impatient to hear you prove, as much to my satisfaction, that I, who never saw any such miracles performed, nor any such prophecies fulfilled, have sufficient means of conviction at this vast distance of time; for this, as I take it, is the precise point of the controversy, where the proofs in favour of our religion labour most.

*Dech.* Yes, here they labour with unsurmountable difficulties. To wave the business of prophecies; what-



ever reason any man may have for believing, that a particular doctrine comes from God, upon seeing another work a miracle in confirmation of it, he cannot prove to a third person, that it comes from God, unless he too can work a miracle for the conviction of the said person, to whom he delivers the doctrine; for, if a miracle was necessary to conviction in the first step of the tradition, it must be also necessary in the second; and so on for ever. From hence it appears, that miracles can only prove a doctrine to be divine to him or them, who were eye-witnesses of those miracles.

*Temp.* This seems to have great strength in it.

*Shep.* Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, if a person, whom you knew to be an honest and clear-sighted man, should solemnly assure you he saw a dead man restored to life, what would you think of his testimony?

*Dech.* As I could not possibly have as strong an assurance of his honesty, clear-sightedness, and penetration, as of the great improbability of the fact, I should not believe him.

*Shep.* Well; it is true he might be deceived himself, or intend to impose on you. But in case ten such persons should all, at different times, confirm the same report, how would this affect you?

*Dech.* Whatsoever reasons I had to confide in their veracity before, this would induce me to believe them a parcel of cheats, who had agreed to impose on me.

*Shep.* Suppose, instead of ten, there were an hundred of them, and they no way interested to deceive you, or induce others to believe the fact.

*Dech.* This would greatly surprise me at least; but you know an hundred might conspire to propagate the falsehood, as well as ten; and how could I be sure they were no way interested?

*Shep.* It is not so likely, that an hundred men should all be cheats and villains, as that ten should; nor is it at all probable, that so many persons, all lyers and deceivers, should, during their whole lives, be staunch and true to such a confederacy. Rogues seldom fail to betray one another; and plots, in which many persons are concerned, and bound together by a common interest, are almost

almost always discovered by some one or other, who finds a greater interest of his own in accusing the rest, than he could propose to himself by concealing the cheat, and only sharing in the common profits to be expected from it. Among so many hypocrites and impostors it is hard to suppose, that not a single one should be found, who was not faithful to the rest, and to the scheme of imposition they were carrying on, so far as to resist all temptations, and encounter all manner of calamities, rather than detect the unprofitable cheat. *Judas* indeed sold his Master for a sum of money; and, repenting, hanged himself for what he had done. But he made no discovery of any impositions or combinations between Christ and those on whom his miracles were performed; he did not even insinuate, that what appeared to be a miracle, was the effect of secrets, nostrums, natural causes, or legerdemain. Now as *Judas* did not spare the person of his Master, we cannot imagine him capable of greater tenderness for his reputation and religion, than for his life. This transaction is a full vindication of our Saviour's miracles; shews they were real miracles, and convincing proofs, that he who wrought them, came from God; and shews at the same time, as well as the money given to the soldiers, who were set to guard our Saviour's body, that bribery and corruption, as well as persecution, were employed against our religion; insomuch that it cannot be said, the disciples of Christ wanted encouragement to detect, since there was even a temptation, and that no small one to men who were so needy, to betray, their Master. But in case the report made by those men should evidently appear, not only to promote no interest of theirs, I mean no temporal interest, but, on the contrary, should expose them to the greatest hardships, and bring on them the most frightful persecutions, such as imprisonment, scourging, and death in the most hideous shapes, and tormenting circumstances; and if they should all still persist in the report, notwithstanding all this; you could no longer suspect the men of self-interested designs, or by-ends.

*Dech.* I should think them a set of the most unaccount-

able-enthusiasts in the world; and enthusiasm, you know, may do much.

*Shep.* True, it may; but we must not ascribe to it effects beyond its power. It may carry multitudes with it to certain lengths; but can oblige only a very few to persevere in it to death. Such instances as that of *Vanninus* are very rare, and can prove nothing, but that the men were stark-mad. But, much as it may do in matters of fancy and imagination, in those of sense its power is small, and hath never been known to influence more than one or two at a time, to believe they saw that which they did not see. That argument must be very weak, which sounds itself on a supposition, that so great a number of persons, in all other respects sober and rational, should imagine they saw a dead man raised to life, when no such fact had ever been presented to their eyes. Enthusiasm, however, cannot possibly account for the testimony given by our Saviour's enemies to the truth and reality of his miracles, which they were unable to deny, and therefore ascribed them to the power of an evil spirit. The Scribes, Pharisees, and Rabbi's of the *Jews*, were men of such penetration, and that penetration was so sharply set upon our Saviour, and his miracles, that we may be sure, had it been possible to convict either the one, or the other, of imposture, they had done it. But, instead of this, all they could do was to attribute the wonders they saw performed, to a diabolical power.

*Dech.* We cannot be clear in this, because we have no testimony of the matter, but what the followers of Christ, who were interested, have been pleased to give us.

*Shep.* I think I have shewn they were interested, as strongly as men could be by worldly considerations, to stifle all accounts in favour of our Saviour's miracles, to disbelieve or deny them, as well, nay, more than those who crucified their Master. As the judicious Dr. *Jenkins* observes, had the apostles been conscious to themselves of confederacy and fraud, and known that the unbelieving *Jews* could have brought even a feasible proof against the truth of their Master's resurrection; they would never have chosen *Jerusalem*, where the fact could have been best disproved, as the fittest place to as-

fert

sert it in ; and that, immediately after the great attention given to that fact both by the *Jews* and *Romans*, and the utmost precaution to prevent the least imposture in respect to it ; nor would they have so openly maintained, in the face of the *Jews*, the reality of such a fact, had they been conscious to themselves, that it was possible for their adversaries to refute what they said about it. No, they would either privately, like the teachers of our new light, have insinuated the falshood to silly and new-fangled people ; or they would have gone to some distance from the place where it was possible to prove them cheats and lyers, and there have laboured with less controul to establish the belief of the strange story they had to tell. Instead of doing either the one or the other, with a full confidence in the justice of their cause, and the impossibility of shaking its credit in the least, they stood to the truth of their Master's resurrection at the very time and place it was done in, and to the face of the *Jewish* people, and their rulers. There never was, I believe, a more unfit occasion for a lye to make its public appearance, than at the feast of the Pentecost, when there were such numbers present, who could have shewn its falshood ; nor a better opportunity for the *Jewish* rulers to convict the publishers of it before their brethren, who were assembled from so many and so distant countries, to celebrate that festival, and who, they knew, must carry home with them an opinion either of its truth or falshood. Yet in this assembly the Apostles had the boldness to put the truth of Christ's resurrection to the test ; and the *Jews*, instead of being able to deny it, seeing a most prodigious miracle wrought in confirmation of it, before that very concourse, went over to Christianity by thousands that very day. Thus the working of such miracles as the most implacable and sharp-sighted adversaries could not deny, went on, and conversion followed. But, had the rulers of the *Jews* actually detected any one of those miracles of imposture, they, we may be sure, had taken care to publish and spread that detection ; and, as during the first ages they and the *Romans* had it more in their power to preserve their accounts of these matters, than the Christians had to pre-serve



serve theirs, *Celsus*, who wrote against the Christian religion in the second century, could have easily set up those authorities against the Christian vouchers; but he too was forced to admit the miracles, and ascribe them, as the Pharisees had done, to the power of the devil.

*Dech.* We have nothing remaining of that great man's performance, but what *Origen*, who was his adversary, and a bigot to Christianity, has thought proper to give us; and he, it is to be suspected, would not leave upon record such objections of his opponent, as might affect the seeming truth of his own religion.

*Shep.* We must suppose *Origen* took care to answer *Celsus* as well as he could, at least on the main points; and, had *Celsus* argued from any record of a detection, such as I mentioned just now, *Origen* must have given up the whole matter in dispute, had he been silent on an argument of so much weight. But from the very objection of *Celsus*, that our Saviour's miracles were wrought by a diabolical power, it is plain he had never heard, that any of them was detected of imposture; for, had this been the case, he could not have argued against them in any other light, than as the effects of deceit and legerdemain, as mere human delusions, not as magical or diabolical wonders. Upon the whole, the enemies of Christianity were men of great understanding and power; and its abettors were in every respect the weakest people in the world. The former, therefore, had it infinitely more in their power to entice some, and frighten others, either into a real or pretended detection; and, when they had accomplished their design, knew much better how to give it strong appearances, and make the memorial of it lasting. This art they tried, but made no advantage of it; and therefore were obliged to betake themselves to mere force and cruelty, in order to suppress that, which they could not refute.

*Dech.* It seems not a little strange to me, that the abettors of Christianity should make the ignorance of those who first established that religion an argument in its favour, since all the world must own, that such simple folks might have been much more easily imposed on, than persons of greater knowledge and sagacity.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* The ignorance of our Saviour's witnesses is with an ill grace turned into an objection against their veracity, by men, who cannot but be conscious to themselves, that, in case persons of distinguished sense and ability had been employed for that purpose, the doubters and libertines of later ages would have ascribed all they said to artifice, policy, and combination. Ignorance and knowledge, it seems, altho' so opposite in themselves, are alike fit to disqualify those, in whom they are found, to bear witness to a religion we do not like.

*Dech.* Say what you will, those witnesses you speak of, were by either temporal, or spiritual considerations at least, strongly interested to vouch for your religion; and therefore their evidence must be of little weight.

*Shep.* This may account for their adhering privately to the religion of their Master; but could never of itself have induced them to labour in proselyting others; for that, as I have already observed, was directly against their temporal interest, and could never have been reconciled to their hopes in futurity, but by an express command from God.

*Dech.* When testimonies are alleged for facts, we are to weigh the improbability of the facts against the credibility of the witnesses, before we give up our assent to either the one, or the other. If the improbability on the one side is equally balanced by the credibility on the other, there is a destruction of both, and the assent must be suspended. But, in case the arguments for the improbability appear to preponderate, then our assent must lean to the improbability in a ratio of the surplus; must be, as the superiority of the arguments to the testimonies. Now experience, and the evidence of our senses, prove to us, for instance, that the dead never revive; and that the stated laws of nature are never violated by God, nor can be by man. No testimony of men for the resurrection of one who was dead, can be so strong as this evidence of experience; and therefore the quantity of assent must be proportionable to the excess of experience over the credibility of those, who bear witness to the fact (a).

(a) See the philosophical essays concerning human understanding, Essay 10.

*Temp.* I believe it will be no easy matter to answer this argument.

*Shep.* It was answered already, towards the close of our first conference. But, as it now comes forth in a new mathematical armour of ratio's and equations, we must treat it as a new argument. However, it amounts to no more in *English* than this, that when reasons, or causes of assent, are brought for both sides of a question, we ought to close with the strongest, in proportion as it appears to be the strongest; and that experience in the present question, appearing stronger than testimony, the assent ought to go along with experience.

*Temp.* That is all the argument contains; but it is a great deal.

*Shep.* Your experience, Gentlemen, never furnished you with an instance of a resurrection, it is true; but neither does your experience tell you, that Christ did not rise again, after he was dead; nor that this was impossible. You have no evidence of sense against the fact; nor of reason, against the possibility of it. Judging by your experience, and past observation, you are confident *the sun will rise to-morrow*. But no experience can make you sure of this, till it shall actually arise; *for it implies no contradiction to say it will not arise (a)*. Neither does it imply a contradiction to say, Christ arose from the dead. If experience tells you, that dead men seldom, or never, revive; yet you cannot conclude, that no man ever did; *for the contrary is possible*. Nay, no one thing in the world is more possible or easy, provided we ascribe the effect to a sufficient cause. That which is impossible to one agent, may be easy to another. That which a man, or nature, cannot effect, God can perform by a single act of his will. Now it is to the power of God we ascribe the resurrection of Christ; and therefore the power of the agent is sufficient. If, however, the fact, on account of its unusualness, appears improbable, it will, on account of its expediency, appear, in an higher degree, probable, if duly considered. Such is the goodness and tender compassion of God, that we can hardly help concluding, he would some time or other use means

to

to retrieve mankind from ignorance, wickedness, and misery. If philosophy, and other ordinary means, were insufficient, recourse must be had to extraordinary and supernatural means, that is, to revelation; for we cannot possibly conceive any other effectual expedient for such a purpose; nor can we conceive, how the person, by whom the revelation should be made, could prove himself to be a messenger sent from God, without working miracles. Were he vested with no higher signs of power than other men, his plainer dictates would appear to be no more, than the obvious suggestions of common sense, or, at most, of philosophy; and if he delivered any doctrines undiscoverable by the force of reason, they would appear to be less; in either respect he could only teach in his own name, not in that of God, and consequently without authority or effect. That it is highly probable God would send us an instructor, thus qualified and impowered, and that this is not a probability, only invented by divines to serve the purposes of Christianity, appears evidently from hence, that *Plato* fell into the same way of thinking, long before our Saviour came into the world. He was strongly of opinion, that God would send some person, or being, into the world, who should teach mankind how they ought to serve the Supreme Being. But, had such a person appeared in *Plato's* time, that philosopher would, no doubt, have expected from him the signs and credentials of a divine commission, which could have been nothing else, but miracles; for without miracles the pretended messenger could have had no right to dictate to *Plato*, nor to assume any higher character, than that of a philosopher. If he could have done no more than an ordinary man could do, how could he have answered the expectations of our philosopher, or have appeared to come from God? Now, Gentlemen, if the fact of our Saviour's resurrection appears improbable, when nothing else is considered, but the common course and nature of things, it must appear in a quite contrary light, when what I have just now alleged is candidly taken into the account: if it is, it will at least balance the arguments for the improbability of that fact, and give the vouchers for it their full force, without any deductions



ductions or subtractions on account of the argument advanced from experience. Give me leave to illustrate what I have urged by an instance, wherein the assent is rationally given, against the current of experience, upon far less testimony, than that which supports the fact in question. A Negro hath a constant uninterrupted experience, that water is fluid, soft, and easily penetrated: yet from the repeated, disinterested testimony of northern people, who trade in *Guiney*, and of whose veracity he makes no question, he may have such reasons given him, as he cannot rationally resist, to believe that the water in northern countries is sometimes so hard, as to bear loaded waggons, &c. This testimony a Negro often receives, and often believes, without any further proof than the concurrence of the reporters, who are known by him to be men of truth, and known also to have no temptation to combine, in order to impose on him in a thing of this nature. But if many or all of these reporters should, instead of gaining, lose a great deal by their report, this would help to raise his conviction still higher; or if they should suffer death, rather than give the lye to their own testimony, his dependence on their testimony would then be cleared of all doubts, and wholly overpower the arguments, drawn from his experience, concerning the perpetual fluidity of water. Here is a rational conviction on testimony, against experience, without ascribing the extraordinary fact to the agency of a superior being, or rendering it at all probable by any previous proof of its expediency. Now this is so natural, and so common an instance, that I cannot but wonder at their assurance, who know it, as well as I do, and yet argue, as if the like could not, or ought not to take place, in other matters, wherein the reasons for it are much stronger.

*Dech.* After all you have said, it is hard to believe against experience, and a great inlet to imposture and superstition. I therefore cannot help thinking, that, if God intended we should give credit to facts so extraordinary, he would now-and-then exhibit, a little nearer to our view, somewhat of the like nature, that we might have an opportunity of examining into them by our own reason, and satisfying ourselves.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* We are not to prescribe to God, nor to expect more evidence from him in religious matters, than we are ready to yield our assent to in things of another nature. Yet, if to grant even this your further demand will satisfy you, a few words will shew, that some provision may have been made for that also. If the person, who is said to have wrought miracles, is likewise said to have uttered prophecies concerning events, which nothing but the wisdom of God could have foreseen; if we are satisfied of the antiquity ascribed to these prophecies, and of the exact conformity between them and some recent events; we cannot but look on them as equivalent to miracles, nor help believing, that he, who uttered them, might have performed other things, as demonstrative of the Divine power, as these are of the Divine wisdom, notwithstanding that his experience furnishes him with no instances of facts against the established laws, or the common course, of nature. None but God could have enabled any man to foretel the destruction of *Jerusalem*, the persecutions set on foot against the Christians, the rise or progress of Antichrist, or the Pope, nor so exactly to characterize the principles and practices of our infidel apostles. If God hath bestowed such a supernatural gift on men, he may have also communicated with it the power of working miracles. Here experience and observation shift sides a little, and fall in with the testimony in favour of miracles.

*Dech.* For my part, I cannot see, that these prophecies were either intelligible in themselves, or cleared up by answerable events; but, be that as it will, contrary arguments and evidences destroy each other, in proportion to their respective degrees of strength: and therefore, altho' a rational person should believe in your religion, as a consequence of having first believed, that miracles were wrought in proof of its Divinity; yet his experience must be a considerable clog on his assent, a weighty counterbalance to the grounds of his faith, which must therefore be, in a great measure, precarious and sceptical.

*Shep.* This way of balancing evidences, and subtracting the less from the greater, in order to proportion the assent to the overplus, ought not to be passed over without examination.

mination. As propositions, in themselves, are either true or false; so they must appear to be either true or false, to the mind, before it fixes its assent. As soon as the judgment hath weighed the evidences for and against any proposition, and fully rests in the belief of that proposition, altho' the evidences against it were allowed all their weight in the scrutiny; yet they are now regarded as false, and thrown intirely out of the scales. Were not this the case, how could a jury, on oath, find their neighbour guilty of murder, after a trial, in which he had produced considerable evidence for his innocence, against superior evidence for his guilt? Altho' all good jurors make it a rule, in doubtful cases, to err on the merciful side, rather than on the contrary; it is, however, plain, in this case, that they have no doubts, arising from the evidence in favour of the prisoner, notwithstanding the strength of that evidence. It is true, indeed, that when the evidences, on both sides of any point, appear equal, there can be no assent given, with the approbation of reason. It is likewise certain, that opposite arguments, not equal, but nearly equivalent, leave a faint and feeble assent on the side where the superiority seems to lie; but if the superiority appears to be very great on one side, the assent of a rational mind closes intirely with it, believes without reserve, and, having regarded the arguments against its assent as nothing, ceases to attend to them, or intirely forgets them; acting, in this respect, as the mathematician does, who, after he hath drawn his conclusion, rests therein, and attends no longer either to the several steps in his demonstration, or to the difficulties that had impeded those steps.

*Dech.* Still the testimonies, produced for miracles, are but the testimonies of interested persons; and therefore are not to be set in the balance against experience.

*Shep.* It seems, to me, impossible, that those, who saw the miracles wrought, and yet were not converted, and interested on the side of Christianity, should become vouchers for those miracles, and advocates for that religion they were wrought in proof of: but how, in the name of common sense, were the first converts interested, on the side of Christianity? Were not all their hopes in  
another

another world? And was not the strength of these hopes, and the interest founded on them, a full proof of their own conviction? Could any reasonable man, to whom they bore testimony of the miracles, have desired from them a clearer proof, that they actually saw the miracles, than their becoming sincere converts to Christianity, and, in consequence of their conversion, renouncing all their temporal interests, in order to secure an eternal? But if the testimony of men, thus interested from the beginning on the side of Christianity, will not please you; what think you of those, who, from its bitterest enemies, were brought over, by miracles, to be its most zealous advocates? Their testimony is that of adversaries. Now of this sort Christianity is supported with not a few; among whom, *St. Paul* appears as the most distinguished: his zeal against it required a peculiar miracle, wrought on himself, to overcome it; after which, being fully convinced of its truth and divinity, he interested himself as warmly in its defence, as he had done before in its suppression.

*Dech.* You will not, surely, maintain, that the speeches and epistles of *St. Paul* are to be reckoned among the testimonies of your adversaries, since they were all made and written after his conversion; unless you can prove to us, that his conversion was not sincere.

*Shep.* Is it to be expected, that a person, who is still an adversary to any particular cause, should speak, and write, and die, for that cause?

*Dech.* No; but, when he actually labours in its defence, he cannot, I think, be called its adversary.

*Shep.* It is true: yet if, while he was busied in a bitter opposition to that cause, he received a full conviction in its favour, whatsoever he does, or says, afterwards, towards its support, upon the strength of that conviction, is certainly the testimony of a person, who, in the midst of his prejudices and virulence against it, saw sufficient reasons for going over to it; at least, if this kind of testimony is not, in strictness, the testimony of an adversary, it is of the same, or superior, nature and force. It is a full evidence of conviction against the most inveterate prejudices, and the strongest aversion. I forbear to ex-

patiate



patiate on the irresistible proof, drawn, in favour of our religion, from the conversion of *St. Paul*; because you, and every one, must have seen *Mr. Lyttelton's* letter on that subject; in which there is such ample justice done to the argument I have been urging, as cannot but equally prevent all that otherwise might have been said, on either side of the question. The candid reader of that incomparable paper, whose author can be no more suspected of a previous bias to Christianity than *St. Paul* himself, stands in need of nothing else, to make him a sincere Christian.

*Temp.* I see, to my great satisfaction, that the evidences for the second step of tradition may be very strong: when multitudes of eye-witnesses die, to convince one of a fact, tho' it may be very strange, one can hardly help believing it. But still I am somewhat at a loss to foresee how you will bring down this evidence to me, who live at such a distance from the facts, and make it even clearer than the assassination of *Cæsar*, as you undertook to do.

*Shep.* This I am ready to do, if you, or *Mr. De-thaine*, will be pleased to state the difficulties, that seem to break the chain of evidence, by which you know the certainty of the Gospel-history is usually deduced by Christians.

*Dech.* Altho', in favour of the Gospel-history, it may be said, that those who wrote it, were not interested so to do, or to defend it; yet when the church, from being persecuted, came to be loaded with rich endowments, idly conferred by our bigotted ancestors on a set of men who pretended to Divine assistance, and to a contempt for such support as mere worldly wealth and power could give them; then, I am sure, it will be owned, the sticklers for Christianity had worldly reasons enough for their attachment to it. Their testimony, therefore, must be of little weight with us, who know what they gained by it.

*Shep.* Howsoever interested they may have been, yet, as the original evidence for Christianity was fixed in the writings of the Evangelists, and the immediate Disciples of our Saviour; their successors, in later ages, could have added little to that evidence: and the question is not now  
concerning

concerning any testimony we pretend to derive from them, in favour of facts said to have been done so long before; but, how far the original evidence, reduced to writing, may be reasonably suspected to have suffered by the hands, through which it hath passed.

*Temp.* That is our present question.

*Dech.* But might not the interested clergy, of the fourth or fifth century, for instance, have forged those evidences, which now pass for original, and brought them into credit, by degrees, among those bigots, the then laity, over whose understandings and consciences they had gained an intire ascendant? You know the very first ages produced abundance of gospels, epistles, *Sibylline* oracles, &c. which were received, for a time, in many churches, and afterwards proved to be spurious. This being the case, those writings, which are now esteemed authentic, may have been forgeries too, for ought we, at this distance of time, can tell. Christians are not yet agreed about the canon of the Old Testament, nor were those of the first ages more unanimous about that of the New, several parts of which were not admitted into it till after a considerable tract of time, and many doubts concerning their genuineness.

*Shep.* All those doubts serve only to furnish us, in these ages, with the stronger assurances, that supposititious writings could not easily find admittance into the canon of the Scripture. We see, by the reception they met with, that our forefathers were scrupulous and careful to detect such impositions; and, had it not been for the distinction made between the spurious and genuine writings of the earlier ages, we could not, at this day, be certain that any care had been taken, at all, in that behalf; which would greatly have affected the credit of the Scriptures: so that this objection, drawn from counterfeit scriptures, and so much insisted on by Libertines, is really a strong argument in favour of the true. No other antient book can be so well proved to have been the work of the author it is now ascribed to, as every book of the New Testament can be proved to have been written by him whose name it hath all along borne; that is, by a writer who was an eye-witness of the facts he vouches,  
who

who received the doctrines he delivers from the immediate dictates of the Holy Ghost, and who proved his inspiration by the miracles he wrought. There were such distinctions made, and so much care taken, by the primitive church, to ascertain this, as leaves no room for doubts concerning it. You would be much better pleased, Mr. *Dechaine*, if you employed a person to receive a considerable sum of money for you, with his examining every piece by itself, and throwing out some, which he found to be either of base metal, or counterfeit coinage, than if he received the whole in bulk, and, without any farther scrutiny or trouble, gave a full discharge for it. His care in this matter, and detecting the false pieces, would not, I believe, induce you to think all the money he received, as sterling, was counterfeit, and he himself an errant cheat. As to those parts of the New Testament which were once doubted of, they were such writings as were directed to, and lodged in the hands of, particular churches: and as the primitive Christians were extremely shy of admitting performances, of any sort, to a level of authority with such as were deemed of Divine original; it is but natural to believe, some time ought to have passed, before the writings mentioned could have been vouched for by the particular churches, from whence they were drawn, to the satisfaction of the Christian church in general. But this was very early accomplished, to the satisfaction of the primitive fathers; and afterwards the canon of the New Testament was settled in the council of *Laodicea*, in respect to all the books, excepting the *Apocalypse*, which, as well as the rest, was received by other councils, and regarded, as the work of St. *John*, by the Christian church, and all the Fathers, but *Caius* and St. *Cyril*. Such care was taken in this matter, that it can be no doubt among men of any acquaintance with the Fathers, whether the several books of the New Testament were written by the persons whose names they bear; and such is the conformity between the doctrine of those few books, that were doubted of by some, and that of the rest, which were never questioned, that we cannot ascribe the suspicions of those who doubted, in opposition to the concurring testimony of so great

a majority; to any thing else but an extreme scrupulosity (a). The canon of the *Jews* is also clearly determined, and as firmly fixed as any thing of that nature can be. The collection of the Sacred Writings made and revised by *Ezra*, who was himself inspired, and by those who, from him to *Simon the Just*, laboured in that work, was from their times, till the days of *St. Jerom*, intirely acquiesced in by all persons, whether *Jews* or *Christians*, who were any way concerned to think rightly about the genuineness of Scripture. The *Pentateuch*, wrote by *Moses* himself, was kept, with the utmost care, in the ark, and the temple, till the demolition of that fabric: during this period of time, the copies, transcribed from this original, were corrected by it, and must have been as perfect, as copies could be; because by them the whole behaviour of the *Israelites*, as well civil as ceremonial, was regulated; and in them the original of all their genealogies, on which the unalienable title to lands depended, was contained and ascertained. At the captivity, as the people were carried away from their own country, and had assurances given them by the Prophets of a restoration; it was a thing absolutely necessary, to preserve, with all possible scrupulosity, the authentic copies, not only of the *Pentateuch*, but of the prophecies, and other sacred writings, because on the former depended all the knowlege of the law, and all the distinctions of the tribes, and particular families; and on the latter all their hopes of a return to their own country, together with the happy and triumphant condition promised them under the *Messiah*. After the captivity, which lasted but seventy years, the canon of the old Testament was formed, and a copy of the Scriptures authenticated; by which all other copies were corrected: from this time to our own, the *Jews* have preserved these books with a circumspection and scrupulosity that approached to superstition: nothing of this nature can be more certain, than that the books of the Old Testament, as they now stand, form the true canon of that Testament; the *Jews* own no other to this day. As to those Christians who would needs force a number of other books into the canon of the Old Testa-

(a) See Bishop *Gibson's* third Pastoral Letter, sect. 4.



ment, they have been so far from succeeding, in that attempt, with the universal church, that they cannot, with all their infallibility, and policy, which goes a great deal farther, bring the learned and honest men, of their own communion, to be satisfied with such an impudent addition to the Scriptures. The great antiquity of some Apocryphal books, and the exalted sentiments contained in them, which seem to breathe an air of Divinity, have not been sufficient, nor ever will, to pass them upon the scrupulosity and jealousy of the Christian world. As to the question, Whether the four Gospels, and the other books of the New Testament, might not have been forged by the interested and designing clergy, in the fourth or fifth, or any other century, when it was now worth their while to lye and cheat, for their religion; I think it can be no question at all, with sober people. Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, did the Emperors and great men of the world endow the church with lands, and otherwise enrich it, before our Saviour had been heard of among mankind; or was it after he had been much talked of, or even believed in, by themselves?

*Dech.* No doubt of it, it was after.

*Shep.* What think you? Were those great men so weak, as to give up their assent, and their lands, to a set of men, who told them a story of most incredible facts, performed three or four hundred years ago, for which they could not produce any written account or record, and had only their own words to vouch for such a tale?

*Dech.* Some written history they probably had, to produce, concerning those facts.

*Shep.* You suppose, then, they suppressed those older histories, which had been so beneficial to them, and had acquired them so much credit and wealth; and forged new ones?

*Dech.* I do not suppose this.

*Shep.* Pray, Sir, be pleased, at the same time, to consider, that, in order to make their forgery pass on the world, they must have also forged all those writings said to have been published in the three or four first centuries, that speak of nothing else but our Saviour and his religion, and quote innumerable passages from the four Gospels, and

and the other books of the New Testament: nay, what is infinitely more difficult than all this, they must have either made their contemporaries believe all these writings of the Evangelists, Apostles, and Fathers, were wrote by their respective authors long since, and carefully concealed till that time; or else they must have persuaded them, that they, namely, their contemporaries, had been reading, transcribing, and arguing, from those writings, all their lives, tho' not one mortal ever saw a single line of them.

*Temp.* This had been impossible.

*Shep.* And if this was a thing impossible for the clergy to effect, in the fourth or fifth century, it was just as impossible, in any other age, from Christ's time to our own.

*Temp.* I really think so.

*Dech.* But if they had forged and interpolated such passages into the old records and writings, as served their particular views and ends; this might have done as well.

*Shep.* It might, perhaps; but what reasons have you for thinking them guilty of this fraud?

*Dech.* It is enough to be sensible, that they might have thought it conducive to their ends: this will render the Scriptures, which might have been so corrupted in some places, suspected in all; and will serve to shew, that, in a matter of so great importance, and in respect to relations of facts so unlikely, writings conveyed down thro' a long tract of time, and thro' hands so interested and partial, are not to be depended on. Now, that they had many and weighty ends to serve, by such interpolations of Scripture, will be plain, if we consider, that Christ had scarcely left the world, when the Christians began to be miserably divided about matters of the greatest importance; such as, Whether their Master was God, or a man: Whether it was necessary, that the Jewish law should be observed by the *Gentile* converts: Whether the resurrection of the dead was to be understood in a spiritual or corporeal sense: Whether it was already past, or to be expected hereafter: Whether a promiscuous use of women was consistent with Christianity,

stianity, or not. These difficulties and disputes, instead of being settled by the authority of inspiration and miracles, generated a swarm of other divisions and subdivisions, which embroiled the five or six first centuries, proved too hard for the councils to settle, and were never tolerably adjusted, till arbitrary power, ignorance, and bigotry, did it, in the monkish ages. Now, Parson, you will own, that, in such violent struggles, which engaged and inflamed the passions of all sects and parties, when the very souls of men were drawn into the war, and a triumph so very eagerly panted after; as a single, express text of Scripture would have turned the scale of a whole controversy, you will own, I believe, the contending parties were strongly tempted to forge, and then trump up, such a text. It would have given peace to the church, you know, and done a world of good; and a little piece of pious fraud, for so good a purpose, might possibly have seemed no unpardonable sin, to a good old Father of the church. For my part, I have the charity for those venerable old gentlemen, to believe they had more sense, especially those of the orthodox party, as it called itself, than to scruple the use of so wholesome, and so healing an imposition.

*Shep.* They are much obliged to you. And so you take all those good old Gentlemen, and Fathers, as you call them, to have been a parcel of monstrous cheats and impostors?

*Dech.* No; not every individual one of them.

*Shep.* For my part, I look upon the far greater number of them to have been the very best of men.

*Dech.* And pray, Sir, for what reason?

*Shep.* Because they despised the world; denied themselves not only the vicious, but what seem, to others, the innocent pleasures of life; and died most nobly, as many of them as were put to the trial, for the religion they professed. Now, Sir, I can hardly suspect such men of forgery and sacrilege, the most villainous and impious that can be imagined. To steal the name and authority of Almighty God, in order to cheat the world into a belief of doctrines, not made necessary by his word, but merely invented by themselves, and that for no benefit

nefit to be reaped by them ; is a degree of boldness and impiety, not to say folly, which, I believe, the most hardened impostors upon earth would be shocked at. But tho' some of them might have been so wicked as to attempt a fraud of this kind ; was there ne'er an one found so honest as to detect it ? Did they all conspire to corrupt a religion, which they had so high a veneration for, as to die in its defence ? Let us grant, however, that this or that party of the clergy were guilty of such a fraud ; since, as you observe, they had other parties to watch and oppose them, they must have greatly exposed themselves, and totally destroyed the credit of the cause they were engaged in, had they been detected in so scandalous a cheat : and that they must have been detected, is beyond all question, unless their adversaries had wisely winked at the imposition, and helped to pass it on themselves. They had no sort of temptation to steal a passage into the Scripture, or materially to change the least sentence or word in it, but in order to a triumph over some of their opponents ; and this itself they could not effect without a miracle, as amazing, to the full, as any ever said to have been wrought since the creation of the world. They must have inserted the new text, or made the alteration mentioned, all at once, in every Bible, whether in the hands of the laity or clergy, over the whole Christian world ; nay, and they must have fixed the interpolation too in every author who might have happened to quote the passage of Scripture into which they were to insert it, and in the head of every person, whether clergyman or layman, who might have remembered the portion of Scripture they intended to enlarge or alter.

*Dech.* This appears plausible ; but the writings of all the antient Christians, excepting those of the orthodox, having been purposely destroyed by that party, or lost in the gulph of monkish ignorance, it is not to be wondered at, that we cannot now-a-days produce the clashing copies of the Scriptures, that might have been set up by that party against party in the primitive times.

*Shep.* I have already shewn, that material differences between various copies of the Scriptures have, in all ages of the church, been a thing next to impossible. Some



differences, indeed, might and did arise; but either they were of no consequence in the controversies of Christians, or, if they were, they were easily adjusted by collating of copies, especially of the new with the old, and two or three successions of copies were sufficient to extend from Christ's time to the present. As to the monkish ages, in which Popery prevailed over the Western churches, it was, indeed, the most favourable period of time for corrupting the Scriptures, excepting the present, in which so little care or attention is given to those ancient records. But we have sufficient reason to acquit the *Romish* church of the corruption you insinuate against her. The Papists certainly did not, in the monkish ages, attempt this fraud, having no occasion for it, as the Scriptures, during that time, lay in languages little understood by even the clergy, and still less by the laity; as they were in little use, either for regulating the faith and manners of men, or for the determination of controversies, the spirit of controversy being, in those days, almost asleep; and as the Western world was so much at the devotion of the Pope, that neither he, nor his clergy, had much reason to fear the Scriptures should ever give them any disturbance. Accordingly, when the reformation broke out, and the Protestants every-where appealed to the Scriptures, the Papists had the work of corrupting and perverting the word of God, to begin, when it was too late; and therefore they had no better shift, than to vilify it on all occasions, and set up oral tradition in its stead. Now if they had been so free with the Scriptures as you intimate, it is very surprising they should not have expunged, or at least qualified, those passages in the Sacred writings that so strongly oppose the pretensions of the Popes. But it is far from true, that the partisans of the Popes had the Scriptures intirely in their hands during those ages in which debate and inquiry are said to have taken so long a nap. The Eastern churches, with which they had almost perpetual contests, sometimes about image-worship, sometimes about the patriarchate, sometimes about discipline, and the procession of the Holy Ghost, made it impracticable for them to corrupt the Scriptures: besides, they were generally engaged with

with one another in warm disputes about grace, predestination, and the sacrament of the Lord's supper; and had, moreover, the *Waldenses* and the *Wickliffites* to deal with, towards the latter end of this darker period of the church. Altho' the differences that exercised the pens, and drew the attention, of those ages, were not so frequent as those of the foregoing; yet they were sufficient to hinder the corruption of the Scriptures: and, accordingly, the manuscripts of those Scriptures, found in the *Greek* churches at the revival of learning, differed not, in any thing material, from those of the *Latin* churches. Pray, Gentlemen, if any one should now publish a new edition of the Bible, and, in some convenient place, insert such a passage as would, if generally received, decide the controversy about the Divinity of Christ, or the supremacy of the Pope; would his interpolation serve the cause it was brought in aid of?

*Temp.* No; it would rather hurt it, and bring an imputation of the greatest impiety and impudence on the Editor.

*Shep.* I suppose the future Editors of the Bible would not copy his, at least in this spurious passage.

*Temp.* So far from that, they would not print one chapter, nor even a single verse, after a book, in which the like dissingenuity might have corrupted any other place, as well as that.

*Shep.* It is plain, I think, that no man, who did not intend to lose all his labour and expences, and make waste paper of his whole edition, would either begin, or second, such a senseless cheat: so that, if a publisher had no other principle to act on, but his own profit, he would endeavour to give his customers as correct and faithful an edition as he could. Now what is said of Printers, may, with equal truth, be said of Copiers; and that cheat, which could not be passed upon the world in these times, could no more have been passed upon it in former ages. Our forefathers, of whom modern Libertines speak on this topic, as if they passed their lives in the profoundest sleep or stupidity, were more attentive, and more awake, to religious matters, than we are: and if those who are most indifferent to the affairs of religion

might be the most easily deceived by a surreptitious text of Scripture; there never was an age, since Christ, so capable of being imposed on, this way, as the present. Give me leave, upon the whole, to observe to you, that writings, once proved to be of Divine original and authority, and, as such, admitted by the whole church into the canon of Scripture, must have been from that time regarded by all Christians as sacred; and, being made the rule of their behaviour, the basis of all their tenets and persuasions, and the decider of all their disputes, could not have been materially corrupted, because every church, and almost every family, were defended, by their own copies, against the errors or corruptions of such other copies, as their adversaries might have argued from against them. But, before the canon of Scripture was settled and received by the Catholic church, the manuscripts of the inspired authors, which were not only still extant, but perfectly fresh and legible, and held in the highest veneration, as sacred relics, by all the churches, were sufficient to correct and ascertain all the transcripts of the New Testament, throughout the Christian world. These sacred originals, thus highly esteemed by all Christians, continued in the church till long after the genuine books of Scripture were sufficiently distinguished from the spurious, and the whole text of the New Testament so precisely settled, that no reasonable man could dispute it, unless in some few passages, rendered immaterial, either by the indifferent tendency of their contents, or by the abundance of other undisputed passages, that made good the same doctrines. To conclude, we cannot conceive it possible, that so many thousands of people should, in so short a time, crowd into the church of Christ, in the teeth of all their inveterate prejudices, and of the most outrageous persecutions, had not miracles been everywhere wrought for their conviction; nor can we, without horrible blasphemy against the wisdom of God, suppose, that he should have wrought so many miracles to propagate a religion, which was to depend on the genuineness of its records, and yet not provide sufficiently, whether by Divine or human means, against the change or corruption of those records. If the ordinary methods  
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of his providence had not been sufficient for this purpose, we cannot help concluding, that he would have vouchsafed a series of miracles, to ascertain the genuineness of the Scriptures, as well as to prove the doctrines, contained in them, to be Divine; for our conviction must have been a part of his intention, as well as that of the Christians in the Apostolic age. But what hath been already said is sufficient to shew, that no such series of miracles was necessary, and that we have a true and genuine copy of the Scriptures preserved to us by the ordinary course of God's providence. Now, Sir, as you have only objected, that corruptions, mutilations, and additions, might have crept into the Scriptures; give me leave to observe to you, that it is very unfair in you, or any other Deist, to conclude from thence, that such did actually creep in, unless you can give instances; and let me tell you, if that could have been done to any purpose, the sagacious leaders and writers of your fraternity would not have contented themselves with mere suspicions and surmises on this head, instead of instances. All that could be grubbed up of this sort, they drew from the writings of Divines, who have been so careful and ingenuous, as to publish them in their works; so far were they from endeavouring either to huddle up any mistakes made by the copiers of former times, or to introduce new corruptions of their own: and, when malice and ingenuity have made the utmost of these, they are neither capable of hurting any truth, nor establishing any error. Thus having, as fully as the time would permit, vindicated the Scriptures against your objections, or rather suspicions, about their genuineness; I bring them as the authentic records of our religion, records that have passed the tests of those ages in which their authenticity could have been properly tried, and therefore cannot now be called in question, unless you can demonstrably shew when they were actually forged, or when and wherein they were corrupted. I call upon you, in the name of truth, to do this; and must put you in mind, that mere *suspicions* and *may-be's* will be of no more weight, in this case, than against a well-recorded patent, by which an



estate hath been possessed during a series of seventeen hundred years.

*Dech.* The two cases are widely different; for the title to an estate, founded on an antient patent, will, after a long possession, be good, altho' that patent should have been forged, or illegally obtained; whereas prescription cannot be insisted on in favour of opinions, or for the credibility of facts.

*Shep.* We claim no such prescription. But as I have offered some arguments of weight for the genuineness of the Scriptures, and proved, I hope, to the satisfaction of Mr. *Templeton*, that they neither were, nor could have been, materially corrupted; it is now your business to demonstrate the forgery, or corruption, of these records, just as you do that of a deed or patent, in one of the courts at *Westminster*, after having heard the evidence produced in its favour by the lawyers on the opposite side. The judges, you know, would laugh at you, if, in such a case, you should only urge, that the deed *might* have been forged, or the patent, when the original was almost destroyed by time, *might* have been corrupted in the transcribing.

*Dech.* It is very well, indeed: so no passage of Scripture could ever have been mutilated, or altered. Yet we are told, by the Divines themselves, that there are thirty thousand various readings in the copies of the New Testament, as it stands at present.

*Shep.* Not as it stands at present. They say, indeed, that the manuscripts, from whence our present editions of the New Testament were printed, contained, in the whole, upwards of thirty thousand various readings: but as the errors of one manuscript were easily set right by another, and by the sense and context; the New Testament, as it is published at present, is clogged with no such variety of readings. It is true, they are given in some editions, published for the use of the curious and learned, and to shew, against all the cavils of Libertines, the fair dealing of those who took care to give us as exact a sight, as possible, of the New Testament in the original language; that such persons, as cannot peruse the vast variety of manuscripts, may judge for themselves, whether

whether the editors have dealt honestly by them. The ingenious *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis* hath shewn, to demonstration, that the great abundance of manuscripts, brought from *Egypt*, *Asia*, and the Western churches, hath enabled us to settle the Sacred Text, by collating the one with the other, and following that reading which is most agreeable to the sense, upon the clearest and most incontestable footing: which could never have been done, had there been but one or two manuscripts to print from: so this, instead of being an objection against the genuineness of the New Testament, as it stands at present, is the strongest argument, in its favour, that the nature of the thing admits of. It is for this reason, he observes, that we can never have a tolerable edition of either *Velleius Paterculus*, or *Hesychius*, because there happened to be but one manuscript of each preserved; and that *Terence* is now in a better condition than any of the classic writers, merely on account of the great variety of manuscripts, by which the editors of that author adjusted their editions. He says, he saw at least twenty thousand various readings in the manuscripts of this little book, and is sure, that had the same scrupulous care been taken to collate all the manuscripts of *Terence*, that was employed about those of the New Testament, the number of the various readings must have amounted to fifty thousand. After all the noise made by Libertines about various readings, they were little more than literal and involuntary errors of the transcribers, incapable of serving any party, or influencing any debate; and ten times the number might be gathered out of half the printed Bibles in *Europe*, which, all put together, are of no consequence to any one doctrine, controverted, or agreed on.

*Decb.* It was not thought so, when *Sixtus V.* published his edition of the Bible: it was called the Protestant Bible; and one of his successors did what he could to call in all the copies of that edition, and then came out with one of his own, between which and that of *Sixtus*, a divine of the church of *England* hath, I am told, publicly noted about two thousand differences.

*Shep.* It is not to be wondered at in a Pope, that he should endeavour to suppress the honest edition, tho' of his

his predecessor, and give the world a corrupt one of his own, more favourable to his pretensions; but that is far from proving, that the latter could be supported with sufficient authority, or imposed on the Christian world.

*Temp.* I have now seen, what I did not hope for, a satisfactory proof that miracles are a strong evidence of a mission from God, especially when the tendency of that mission is worthy of the Divine Goodness, and necessary to the reformation and happiness of mankind; that this evidence can be communicated to those who never saw the miracles; and that the records of it may be made lasting and perpetual. The evidence for the facts of the Christian history is incomparably clearer and stronger than that for the assassination of *Cæsar*, which yet it would be madness in any one to question. No-body died for the truth of what is said, concerning that fact, by historians; no-body was concerned, at the peril of his eternal salvation, to preserve the records of it uncorrupted; and if it may be said, that no-body was concerned to corrupt them, or to impose such a story on posterity, it may be as truly said, that no mortal could think it his duty to prevent such an imposition. But the testimony given to the Christian history hath this peculiar to itself, and beyond all other historical testimony, that it was, in all worldly respects, the unquestionable interest of those who vouched and died for it, to deny and renounce it to all mankind. I did not imagine, *Mr. Shepherd*, you could have cleared up this important point so well; and as I have the vanity to think, you had my satisfaction in some measure in view, I return you my hearty thanks for what you have done.

*Shep.* Had you looked into the writings of many Divines among us, who have handled these points more fully and ably than I can pretend to do, you might have seen this long ago.

*Temp.* The difficulties came oftener in my way, than the solutions; and, besides, I doubted of my own judgment, and was afraid to examine.

*Dech.* Thou art born to be the ass, the packhorse, of some Priest, and to drudge under him, and his bundle of superstitious

superstitious implements, to the day of thy death. Is it not the Parson's trade to deal in such wares as he hath here huddled together? And will you give up yourself to a man who makes a livelihood by imposing on you, and others, in these matters?

*Temp.* If it is a trade, I am sorry, poor man, he does not thrive better by it.

*Dech.* I rather think, he hath more than he deserves.

*Shep.* Indeed I have.

*Dech.* No doubt on't, you think so: but this I think, that you are happy in having Mr. *Templeton* for a disciple, who goes more than half way to meet every limping argument you propose to him.

*Shep.* I shall think myself very happy, indeed, if the Gentleman is, by my means, even introduced to an inquiry concerning matters of the greatest consequence to him. As what I have said was with that view only, I hope he will not satisfy himself with a chain of reasoning so cursory, but look farther, and consult those writers who have exhausted the subjects we have been only chatting over.

*Dech.* But, Mr. *Shepherd*, you have all this while been proving nothing, only that the Christian religion may possibly recommend itself as a probable history of facts to the learned, who are masters of *Greek* and *Hebrew*, and who make but a small part of mankind. Before it can be made at all intelligible to the vulgar, who alone are capable of an hearty acquiescence in it, you know it must be translated into their own languages. Now there are no two languages in the world, tho' spoken for many ages in adjacent countries, the words and phrases of which exactly correspond; but if any two nations be greatly removed from each other, in time and situation, as they widely differ in their buildings, dress, food, customs, furniture, instruments of husbandry and mechanism; so it is impossible to make a tolerable translation of any book out of the one language into the other, when the terms and phrases of those languages are so very incongruous. If, moreover, the people of the one nation are much addicted to parabolical and figurative expressions, and those of the other affect a plainness of speaking; this will



will considerably increase the difficulty: so much of the beauty and propriety of the plainest performance is lost in the most careful translation you can make of it into the nearest language to that of the original, that, as Don *Quixot* hath observed, the original may be justly compared to the right side of the arras, where all the figures appear in their due proportions, and natural colours; and the translation to the wrong side, where the proportions, and colours, and shades, are all, in a manner, blended together, and presented to the eye in the greatest confusion. Hence it will unavoidably proceed, that he who reads the Scriptures translated into any modern language, as he is unacquainted with the names of things, and the phrases used by the original authors, will have little or no taste of the peculiar manner and propriety; and, what is worse, can never be sure he rightly apprehends their meaning, especially as the translators may, either thro' ignorance, or design, have given a wrong turn to the passages of the greatest consequence.

*Shep.* The Scriptures have not been translated, as other books usually are, by one person, but by many, who must all have been either ignorant, or dishonest; or material perversions could not have taken place: and as to ours, it was re-examined by the Convocation; and they must have been an illiterate sort of men, if they could not have seen how to rectify such mistakes of consequence, as might have passed the first concoction. And to say they knew well enough how to rectify them, but all conspired to impose a false translation on the world; is to make them all a parcel of the greatest knaves and fools that ever lived. The mere suspicions of men, who have little or no religion, and the groundless calumnies of bitter enemies to our religion, will never be able to render them suspected by honest and sober people, of a conspiracy to pervert the word of God, to act so unfaithfully between him and his people. But whatever we may think of their consciences, they must have had some regard to their characters, at least; and, surely, nothing could have rendered them so odious and despicable, in the judgment of all men, as unfaithful

ful dealing, in a business of this nature. The eyes of their most implacable adversaries were upon them, adversaries, who were well versed both in the original languages, and in the *English*; and they knew full well, that those who would have burnt their bodies, would not spare their reputations. This is sufficient to convince those of the meanest understandings among us, that our translators and revisers did their best. Now what I have said of the *English* translation of the Scriptures, may be truly said, with little variation, of the other translations of the same writings, made near our own times. The ablest and best hands were chosen out for that purpose, in *Holland*, and other Protestant countries; and their work, when finished in concert, underwent many and severe revisions. It is true, all the translations have their defects; but it is your business to shew us, that all, or any of those defects, are sufficient to pervert either the principles or practice of those, who, not understanding the original languages, are obliged to have recourse to the translations. Many Papists, of great learning, have acknowledged the faithfulness of our versions; and the champions of that Church undertake to refute the Protestants out of their own translations: this is a common practice with them, and, in my opinion, a strong proof, as it comes from such implacable adversaries, that our translators have acquitted themselves, at least, like honest men. If, however, the case be otherwise, why are your ablest writers so remiss, as not to support themselves with instances of perverted passages in our translations? Now that the work they had in hand was neither impossible, nor of so great difficulty as you represent it, I hope I shall fairly make appear. If a book, wrote by one of the inhabitants of *Jupiter* or *Saturn*, were to be translated into some of the languages spoken here on earth, I do not know but your sentiments, on this subject, might be true enough, as to such an undertaking. When the writer, and those for whose use he is translated, have little or nothing in common, he can scarcely be rendered intelligible to them. But, as the senses and rational faculties of all men are the same, their general notions can

can be transfused out of one language into another, without undergoing the smallest change or loss. Hence it comes to pass, that religious or moral treatises, the notions and terms of which must, by the nature of the subject, be, for the most part, general and common, are more easily translated than any other sort of writings.

*Dech.* But as the doctrinal and practical part of your religion lies interspersed with the historical in the Scriptures, and as history treats of manners, customs, buildings, cloaths, implements of war and arts, this, it must be confessed, renders a translation of those writings more difficult, than that of mere moral or religious performances.

*Shep.* This difficulty is purely critical, affects not the clearness or truth of the main facts; and, besides, it is far from being so great as you represent it. The custom only alluded to in one passage, is more fully described in another, or by such antient writers, whether *Jewish*, *Christian*, or profane, as lived in or near the times. The terms of arts, sciences, buildings, &c. can be well supplied, as they are few and simple, from the same or the like arts, sciences, &c. among modern nations. As to small differences in such matters, it is of no consequence whether they are lost in the translation or not: for example; it is no way material to any doctrine of faith or practice, to put the *English* word *garments* for *ἱμάτια*, *Matth.* xxvii. 35. although our cloaths are of a different make from those of our Saviour. The *English* reader is at no loss to understand what is said concerning the parting of Christ's garments, for not being told, that they were long, plain, and flowing, after the manner of the Eastern nations, and consisting of a kind of cassock and furtout. You seem to lay great stress on the figurative or parabolical expressions, as if it were impossible to render them intelligible in countries, where a plainness of speech is affected: but it happens, that no sort of expression is more common in all nations, and to all sorts of people, than the figurative and metaphorical. All languages would be miserably barren and defective, if such modes of expression were thrown out of them; and if you consider the matter never so little,  
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you will find, there are an infinity of things that cannot be reasoned on, nor talked about at all, in any language upon earth, but by that very way. Those words, that seem to be most simply and immediately adapted to our notions, are often of this kind; as for instance, *understanding, discourse, imagination, recollection, &c.* The Eastern nations were fonder of figurative expressions, of parables and allusions, than the *Europeans*: yet we are fond enough of them too; and use them so familiarly, that we neither want terms to translate them by, nor a taste and turn of mind to apprehend them. It is worth while to observe to you on this subject, that, although some nations may affect one kind of figure more than another, yet the figures used by all nations are nearly, if not precisely the same; and that the Eastern nations, who were much addicted to metaphor and allusion, are less free with the other figures, than the *Greeks, Romans, or modern Europeans*. All this, however, is only speculation on both sides; but fact and experience, which are of more decisive force than ten thousand refinements of this nature, are strongly on my side, and that in point. There never was so literal a translation of any book, though out of one modern language into another, as the *English* version of the Old and New Testament; and yet our plain illiterate *Englishmen* read and understand it very well, much better, I am sure, than they could any one philosophical or deistical performance, though wrote originally in their own mother-tongue. Nay, what is more, although it is put into their hands in such a manner, as is apt to infuse an early dislike, that is, by those who, with a rod in one hand, and a Bible in the other, teach them to read and spell by it; and although, by the time they come to the use of reason, and some little taste for reading, there is not a single passage, description, or character in it, that is not old and stale to them; yet they are highly pleased, and powerfully moved, by it: which shews, I think, that the spirit of the original is not only well preserved, but strongly and faithfully conveyed, in the translation. This experimental proof in point makes it unnecessary to remind you, that *Herodotus, Thucydides*, and even the poet



poet *Homer*, the oldest of the *Greek* writers, are clearly understood in *English*, although beholding each of them, to the care and learning of a single translator. But men, who, while they were at school, or the university, had neither capacity, nor application, sufficient to make them masters of antiquities, ancient history, or the learned languages, coming afterwards into the world very raw and imperfect scholars, imagine no-body can translate the antient authors to any tolerable purpose, because they could not do it themselves; and so their ignorance and vanity together beget in them this species of infidelity we have been speaking to. Upon the whole, a person well versed in antient learning can more easily apprehend the meaning of the very oldest writers, than half-learned pretenders are apt to imagine; and what he once clearly apprehends and conceives, he can clearly express in his own language, either literally, or, at least, by paraphrase. If this were not the case, there could not be so great an agreement between the translations of Scripture, made in very distant ages and countries, and by persons who could not possibly have combined. But, as we have already dwelt much longer on this topic than it seems to deserve, I shall dismiss it with this observation, that your arguments against the possibility of turning the Scriptures into modern languages, are precisely the same with those urged by the Papists against all the reformed Churches: but I neither pretend to guess from whence you drew those arguments, nor with what view you press them.

*Dech.* That innuendo is very weak. A good argument is nothing the worse for having been used by a Papist, or any-body else, tho' never so ignorant and bigotted. But, if the sense of the Scriptures were so very obvious to the learned, it is a little strange, methinks, that the learned commentators should find it so difficult a matter to settle and agree about it. The commentators of a thousand different or opposite opinions pretend to draw the clearest proofs and demonstrations, for their respective persuasions, from their various interpretations of Scripture. And well they may, since there is such a clashing between the historical and typical, the

the literal and allegorical, and between the strict and plain sense of many passages on the one side, and the mystical, parabolical, or hyperbolical sense, on the other, as leaves an almost boundless latitude of interpretation.

*Shep.* Could you shew, that the different interpretations and contradictions of commentators, which is far from being so great as you seem to make it, arise from the real difficulty and obscurity of the Scriptures, you would thereby gain a great advantage to your cause. But the case is quite otherwise. Most men are strongly attached to their own religious persuasions, whether thro' prejudice of education, if they continue in the opinions of their parents, or thro' self-conceit, if they happen to have made any choice of opinions themselves. There is another vanity, which is apt to carry writers of all sorts to great lengths, I mean that of supporting a new-invented hypothesis. A writer thinks he does nothing, if he does not strike out something that is new in the art or science he writes about. Now religion abounds with these hypothetical contrivers of opinions, as much as natural or moral philosophy; and the Scripture must be tortured and wrested a thousand ways, to make it speak for as many unscriptural systems, invented by brainfick and conceited wretches, who have much learning, and little judgment. Besides, no small part of those commentaries, that feed the bigotry of contending Churches, was wrote by mercenaries, set on, and bribed to the impious work, by salaries, and views of promotion. If then bigotry, vanity, and interest, are allowed to step in between the plainest writings, and those for whose use they were intended, there is no degree nor variety of absurdity; which, by the help of art and learning, they may not force those writings seemingly to countenance, so far, I mean, as to rivet those who are already inclinable to the absurdities they comment for, and often to stagger others, who have no such previous inclination. The writers of manifestoes, and other political papers, can fully demonstrate, in any quarrel between two Princes, that by such and such treaties, formerly ratified on both sides, each Prince hath been the aggressor, altho' the treaties, appealed to by the political

tical hirelings of each party, are couched in terms as strong and explicit as language can afford. The several laws in the *Code of Justinian* are conceived in the most strict and precise terms; and yet the writers of civil law have found means to contradict one another in numberless instances, and to support themselves, on all sides, by voluminous tracts and commentaries on the *Code*. I cannot say all our acts of parliament are as plain and explicit as were to be wished; yet some of them are intelligible enough: this, however, does not hinder the lawyers from frequently arguing, from the plainest of them, for both sides in the same trial. From all this it appears, that we are not to ascribe the different or opposite interpretations of those, who pretend to explain or comment on any writings, intirely to the obscurity of those writings, since we can so easily trace their contradictions, in most cases, to partiality in themselves.

*Deck.* If such variety and dissonance of interpretation may arise among the commentators of the plainest performances, what may we expect from those, who labour in the explication of books, so figurative as the Scriptures?

*Shep.* As to the noise which many commentators on the sacred text have raised, and which the Deists make such a jingle with, about hyperbolical, parabolical, mystical, allegorical interpretations, &c. it may serve, indeed, to give their performances the greater shew of depth and learning, and to furnish the ludicrous Deist with a sort of polemical rattle: but the plain and rational reader of the Scriptures, who is just so much the wiser for never having heard even the sound of it, finds himself as little concerned in the types, as in the interpretation, of the Apocalypse, unless where they are actually explained and applied by the sacred writers themselves; finds the allegories and the parables, not only simple and plain, but beautiful and affecting; and finds himself very far from being hindered, by their means, from gathering, out of the sacred pages, the most useful instructions, and the most powerful persuasives to a good life. As this is too notoriously true to be denied, no ridiculous cant of hard words will weigh with sober people

people against their own experience, of which they feel the great and happy effects. But had not those interpreters of the book of nature, I mean the antient and modern philosophers, made far wilder work, and run into infinitely more and wider contradictions, concerning the most necessary points, both of knowledge and practice, which, you say, are clearly delivered in that universal book, you might have objected the various interpretations of Holy Writ with a much better grace. This whole argument of yours hath often been employed by the Papists, to persuade the world, that the Scriptures are useless, nay, and pernicious, as well to the learned as to the illiterate, without the help of an infallible interpreter.

*Dech.* FROM your unfair way of endeavouring to refute my arguments, by rendering them suspected of a Popish tendency, I foresee you will trace that which I am going to offer to the very *Vatican*.

*Shep.* This I know, that if the arguments you have been urging this pretty while, were admitted, and followed to their utmost consequences, they would lead us all to the Pope's toe.

*Dech.* Be that as it will, I shall not stick to insist, that the common people and the illiterate, even in Protestant countries, have no more of Christianity, than what depends on implicit faith in their Priests. As Priests of all religions, according to the excellent saying of the Poet, are the same, so the vulgar, in all Christian countries, are, in respect to faith and religion, exactly on the same footing. They may believe what is told them; but they can examine nothing; and all you have been saying concerning the purity of the Scripture, and the fidelity of its translators, may be either true or false, for ought they can know. The Scriptures, when translated into their own languages, may be perfectly intelligible to them; and you may work them up, in your own imagination, into as able commentators as you please, which, I think, is but moderately consistent with your dogmatizing to them, every Sunday, on some portion of Scripture or other; yet I cannot



cannot for my life see how they, who make the majority of mankind, and for whose use therefore God must have chiefly intended any religion he ever gave to the world, can rationally satisfy themselves, that the Scriptures have been preserved uncorrupted, or faithfully translated. Miracles may have been wrought, records of these may have been made, enthusiasts of former ages may have been put to death for insisting on the truth of these records, and the animosities of contending Christians may have all along secured the purity of those records, and at length helped to procure a tolerable translation of them into the vulgar languages; but how little of this knowledge in antiquity and history can be supposed to reach a tradesman or farmer? If we should ask one of them, why he believes the Bible to be the word of God, the utmost he could say, would be, that he believes it, because the Parson tells him so, and that Parson would not tell him a lye.

*Shep.* Perhaps it might be so: and if you were to examine him as a witness in a tryal, concerning facts he had seen with his own eyes, he might chance to give you a very lame account of those facts, nay, and without the least intention to render a false evidence, actually contradict himself. Those sort of people, it is true, frequently know but little; and what they do know, they cannot express. But what they do know, is one thing; and what they might know, is another. What they might know concerning the Bible, as it is put into their hands, if I take you right, is our present question.

*Dech.* It is.

*Shep.* Does not an illiterate man find, that all people, whom he hath any dealings or conversation with, are agreed, that the Bible is the word of God?

*Dech.* Perhaps he does. What then?

*Shep.* Is he not sensible, that the Papists, and all other denominations of Christians, are of the same sentiments?

*Dech.* I cannot tell but he may; but pray, Sir, what is that to the purpose?

*Shep.* It is a great step to his conviction, that so many people of all ranks and conditions, great numbers of whom

whom are very learned, and differ widely in many matters, agree so exactly in this.

*Decb.* It is, I own; but that step hath no foundation in reason.

*Shep.* It hath some. What many people, especially if they are not all illiterate and ignorant, agree in, is more likely to be true, than if no-body, or very few, and those very ignorant, were of that opinion. But if he should have reason to think, that all the great Lords, and estated Gentlemen in the kingdom, believe the Bible to be the word of God, would not this be a good reason to confirm him in the same opinion?

*Decb.* No, because they might be mistaken; and besides, it is impossible for him to know whether they be really of that opinion or not.

*Shep.* He knows, that such people are generally well educated, and that there are great numbers among them, who are men of much discernment and knowlege; who would never go to church and sacrament, and suffer their estates to be tythed by the Clergy, if they did not believe the Bible to be the word of God. The most ignorant of the vulgar know, that, in matters of interest and money, all sorts of people look very sharp, and hardly part with a farthing, without very good reasons for so doing. They see the knowing and learned part of their own Lay body suffer the Bishops, and inferior Clergy, when they might hinder them, if they pleased, to enjoy a great income annually in lands and tythes, merely on the score of the Bible. No man can be so ignorant as not to know, that men so fond of wealth, and often so needy, would never permit the Clergy to enjoy so much, which they might take to themselves, did they not think there was some truth in the Christian religion; and their appearing by this expensive proof to think so, is a strong argument for their sincerity; by which means it happens, that the more ignorant people among us have all the sagacity, penetration, and knowlege of the greatest men in the nation to judge with, concerning the genuineness of the Scriptures, and, consequently, have more reason to pin their faith on the sleeves of their Lay superiors, than on those of the Clergy, who do not lose, as the Lords and  
Gentlemen

Gentlemen do, but gain, by the Bible. The ignorant part of mankind derive still stronger assurances for their faith in Christianity from the writings of the greatest, the wisest, and best Laymen that ever lived. Even Kings have employed their pens on the Christian religion; and Laymen, distinguished from the rest of the world by their wisdom and virtue, have rendered themselves no less illustrious by the strength and piety of their writings in defence, or explanation, of Christianity. Every Christian country hath produced numbers of these; and, in our own, Sir *Matthew Hale*, the honourable Mr. *Boyle*, Lord *Nottingham*, Mr. *Nelson*, Mr. *Addison*, and Sir *Isaac Newton*, are but a few out of many learned and judicious Laymen, who have employed the finest talents, and the worthiest hearts, in the service of Christianity. Some of the writings of these great men are intelligible enough to the most ordinary capacities; and those of them, that are more learned and refined, demonstrate this at least to the most ignorant, that their authors were Christians.

*Dech.* And pray, are these all the reasons ignorant people have for believing the Bible to be the word of God?

*Shep.* No; they can easily perceive, that to impose such a book on all the knowing part of the world for the word of God, if it were only the invention of men, had been a thing impossible; that this very book itself condemns such an imposition, and threatens it with the most dreadful denunciations; that many wise and excellent men died for the genuineness and free use of it in their own country, and not very long before their own times; and that no mortal they converse with, hath ever denied it to be the word of God; or, if any one hath done so, that he hath never assigned any reason for so doing, worthy in the least to be set in opposition to the grounds and reasons of their faith. But that plain and illiterate Christians have some other authority for their faith in the Gospel-history, than the mere word of their Priests, is evident from hence, that in places where the ill lives of Clergymen, and the continual outcry of the great ones against them, have taught the common people

to

to despise and distrust them, yet Christianity is not intirely laid aside. All the sensible and virtuous people of such places have so great confidence in its truth, and are so well satisfied with it, that they will go to church, hear a man preach (whom they regard as vile and worthless), join with him in the prayers, and take the sacrament from his hands. Many illiterate persons, who think very contemptibly of the Clergy in general, are, however, firm in their belief of Christianity. They must therefore have some other grounds for their faith, than the word of a Priest, whom they despise, nay, and hate most cordially, as a self-interested wretch, that thinks of little else, than eating and drinking the fruits of their labour, and spunging on their faith. The truth is, they mind but little what the Priest says, either in the pulpit or out of it; and it is really from their parents, who were perhaps as averse and inattentive to the Priest, as themselves, and from the Bible, that they gather the greater part of what they know concerning religious matters; so that the course of their knowledge hath run mostly in a Lay-chanel for a long tract of ages. There is one consideration yet unmentioned, from whence the most unlearned Layman may, if he reflects or thinks at all about religious matters, furnish himself with a kind of demonstration for the truth of the Gospel-history, at least in the main points. He not only sees a religion professed by prodigious numbers of people, learned and illiterate; but he also sees one day in seven set apart for the service of God, according to that religion; he sees the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper received by all sorts and ranks of men; and he sees a ministry supported at a very considerable expence, purely to teach the principles of this religion, and to administer its sacraments. Now he cannot imagine all these usages and expences could have taken their rise from nothing; or that the history of our Saviour, on which they wholly depend, could have passed upon the world, or gained credit, in any age, had it been altogether a figment. He knows mankind would not at first have submitted to the constant celebration of a rite, that threatens those who assist at it, without amendment of life, with damnation, if they had



not known its author, or been fully satisfied about the truth of that religion, of which it makes a part. He knows the world would never have given up a seventh part of their time, which might be profitably applied to their worldly affairs; nor the tenth, or a much greater part of their substance, for the support of men, who could not give sufficient proof of their Divine appointment. Thus the positive institutions of our religion become a standing monument and record of its historical truth to the most illiterate, as well as the learned, in all ages; and if the more ignorant among us do not generally found their belief on this kind of evidence, it is not because the evidence is either obscure or weak, but the people are inattentive to it, and fix their faith without it.

*Dech.* These are far-fetched and very foreign evidences for the bulk of mankind to depend on.

*Shep.* They are fetched no farther, than from Christianity itself, and every day's observation. But, beside these, they have other reasons more internal, and drawn from the Scriptures themselves, for believing that they come from God. The knowledge of their own infirmities and corruptions convinces them, that they want Divine assistance, in order to their living good and happy lives. They believe God is too good to leave them utterly destitute of such assistance; and they are sensible, there is no provision made for it, but in the Scripture. It is from thence alone, that all the assurances they have of a judgment to come, of glorious rewards for virtue, and dreadful punishments for vice, of God's omnipresence and omniscience, and of the means of reconciliation with him after having sinned, are drawn by them. They are sensible they could not have known these things without a revelation; that, if God was pleased to grant the world such a revelation, he would and could provide, that it should be handed pure and uncorrupted to them; and that all the commands, informations, and institutions contained in it, are agreeable to reason, and the nature and wants of man, as well as worthy of his infinite wisdom and goodness, from whom they believe it to proceed. They find, that in proportion as they themselves,  
or

or others of their acquaintances, are careful or negligent to place the grand inducements to holiness, contained in the Scriptures, before their eyes, to adhere to its ordinances, and regulate their actions by its precepts, they in the very same proportion rise to a life of purity and goodness, or sink into corruption and sin.

*Dech.* Yet, after all you have said, you must own the ignorant cannot possibly attain to the same degree of evidence, concerning the Scriptures, with the knowing; and yet reason would tell one, that they ought to be on a level with the learned in a matter of this nature.

*Shep.* I will readily acknowledge they have not the same, or so great means of conviction; but then they can believe as strongly upon those they have. They do not labour under so many and heavy byasses and obstacles to faith, as the great ones, who have opportunities of higher knowlege; and one who is under fewer hindrances to conviction, receives it upon lower evidence, and yet is as thoroughly convinced. You reason with two persons upon any point; the one is under no disinclination to be convinced, and is brought over to you by your first or second argument; whereas, if the point you are pressing, should happen to run against the pleasure or profit of the other, you must multiply arguments; you must urge them with the greatest force and clearness; and, after all, it is odds, but you leave him only half a convert to your sentiments. When the whole evidence, which a knowing and considerate person may have for the Christian religion, is laid all together, it appears to be vastly greater, than is necessary for the conviction of a candid mind; and is intended partly to draw the assent of such, as are most incredulous, or most unwilling to believe, and partly to silence the most obstinate and artful adversary. The rest of our Saviour's disciples as firmly believed in the resurrection of their Master, tho' they trusted their faith to their eyes and ears, as *Thomas*, who, not satisfied with the testimony of those senses, demanded that of his feeling also. He who distinguishes a man from an horse, or a tree, by twilight, is as far from being mistaken, as he who does it at noon-day, tho' the latter hath more light. They, indeed, who are nat-

turally dim-sighted, or who would examine more minutely, whether the man, already distinguished from other objects, hath a fair or tawny complexion, dark or blue eyes, &c. must have a better light, and take a nearer view, than he who only wants to know, whether what he sees is a man or not. In like manner, an illiterate person hath light enough to distinguish the truth of the Christian religion from the falshood of other religions, and clearly to apprehend its main and necessary doctrines, tho' not to direct him in nice and difficult inquiries about it, which he is little, or not at all, concerned in.

*Dech.* If the illiterate may be Christians, it must be on some other footing, than that of reason; and this will make Christianity, howsoever true and excellent in itself, an irrational religion to them. From hence we must conclude, either that Christianity is in itself defective, or that, if the vulgar can have no other religion, God hath not thought their virtue and happiness worth providing for.

*Shep.* I have already proved, that the most illiterate person may have sufficient reasons for being a Christian, altho' not so many reasons as the learned. The ignorant, however, having less opportunity of religious knowledge, than their betters, are determined by the nature of things, in some measure, to be led therein by those before them; who are therefore accountable for the goodness of their apparent principles, to their poor ignorant inferiors, as well as for that of their real principles, to their own consciences and souls. The common people all know they have a King and a Parliament, who make their laws; but, as to what you, or any other lawyer, tells them is contained in a statute, they have only your word for it, that either his Majesty, or the Parliament, ever enacted any such thing; and yet, such is the nature and necessity of things, they must pin their faith upon your sleeves, and with it their properties, their liberties, their lives. Now you are at least as much tempted to be swayed by interest in dictating, or explaining the law, as any Clergyman can be in respect to the Gospel. Ignorant people may have an implicit faith in that which is right, as well as that

that which is wrong ; and, if in most things, such as law, physic, surveying of land, religion, &c. in which they are deeply concerned, the necessity of things is such, that they must partly rely on the judgment and integrity of others, it is certainly the duty of those, who are raised above them by education and knowlege, and set over them by fortune or function, to take care they are not implicitly led into unhappy and fatal mistakes. We of this company have been blessed with happy means of information, and are obliged, under all the ties of religion and humanity, to improve those opportunities to the best advantage, that we may from thence derive, among our ignorant neighbours and acquaintances, the wholesome feeds of profitable knowlege. The vulgar are accountable to God for no more than they have means of knowing. We are accountable in the same manner for our means ; and as we can easily gather more knowlege, than is necessary for our own purposes, we are not to imagine, that our whole lives are to be spent in reading and inquiring ; but that, as the wealthy are stewards for the poor, so we should be treasurers for the ignorant. We owe a great deal this way to the world ; and it would be injustice and cruelty to with-hold it. It would be still infinitely worse, it would be a thing shocking to nature, and monstrous in the sight of God, should we, in obedience to our lusts, or the love of the world, suck in pernicious principles, and then take a pleasure in sowing them among our illiterate acquaintances, who may want knowlege sufficient to defend themselves against them.

*Cunn.* I think it does almost as great dishonour to Christianity to suppose its evidence, in any measure, unapparent to the vulgar, as to suppose it unconvincing to the learned and judicious.

*Shep.* Some part of the evidence for Christianity may be unknown to the illiterate, without detriment to the reasonableness of their faith, if the evidence they may have, is sufficient. But I own it is necessary they should be instructed in the principles of Christianity by others more knowing than themselves ; and that they are liable to error through wrong instructions, and to corruption



by bad examples. The ignorant are therefore compared, in Scripture, to flocks of sheep, weak, simple, liable to be misled and injured; and those who are set over them, to shepherds, who are to feed them with wholesome knowledge, to guide them in safe ways, to be extremely tender of them, and, at last, to account to their great Owner for their care of his precious charge, for whose sakes chiefly they were made great either in knowledge or power. I, as a Clergyman, often tremble, when I consider what I am to answer for; when I reflect, how many souls depend on me, in some measure, for religious knowledge; and you, Gentlemen, who are placed over so many people, ought to be well aware, that they will judge of your principles by your actions, and by your discourses, perhaps when you are most light and careless; that they will be apt to give into your supposed principles, and imitate all they see you do. It is the office of the poorer and lower class of mankind to supply the whole world with the necessaries of life. It cannot be expected of such people, that they should know much of any thing but the one they are employed about, which takes up all their time. Labour exhausts their spirits, stiffens their nerves, and makes them stupid. Reading and disputing therefore, and such-like means of knowledge, they are strangers to; and would know little or nothing of religion, were it not, that they are called off their labour, once a week, to be instructed in it by God's word, and his Ministers. Persons educated and instructed, both Lay and Clerical, are set as lights and guides to the ignorant; and are therefore called in *Homer*, as well as in the Scriptures, the *Shepherds of the people*. The working man is as feet to all the upper classes of mankind. He is next the ground, and supports the whole. Those who stand highest in the world, and can see farthest before them, should do the office of heads and eyes to those, who bear them up, and lift them so high; and if they should lead them, or even suffer them to stray among pits and precipices, they themselves must get a fall for their ingratitude and cruelty; because, if the people, for want of necessary cultivation, grow barbarous and wicked, they will soon too grow averse to honest labour, to agriculture

culture and arts, and betake themselves to rebellion and rapine.

*Dech.* You observe very justly, concerning the common people, that they have neither leisure nor ability to read and dispute; and from thence I think it is plain, that they can have nothing to say to a learned religion.

*Shep.* And pray, how much better, when they are left to themselves, do they understand what you call natural religion? Is it possible for the wildest imagination, even tho' you suppose it possessed and ridden by a Dæmon, to contrive a more monstrous, a more absurd or wicked set of notions, than have been received for true religion in all the ages and nations of the earth, that have not had the benefit of revelation? How could unassisted reason, so magnified by libertines, contrive such hideous schemes of superstition; or, if they had been contrived by priestcraft or power, how could reason have either swallowed them itself, and argued for them, or permitted them to take a full possession of the politest nations in the world? The most ignorant Christian knows more of God, of true religion, and of moral obligations, than the most knowing Pagan that ever lived. A modern philosopher would turn a downright adorer of *Plato* or *Cicero*, should he find such a lecture in either of them concerning the unity, the omnipresence, the omniscience, the justice, mercy, and power of God, concerning the creation of the world, the degeneracy and corruption of human nature, and the means of its recovery, as a poor tradesman or farmer delivers to his children on a *Sunday* evening.

*Dech.* What such persons prate to their children about those matters, I know not; nor do I believe they borrow their ideas of God and morality from mere tradition or learning. God indeed hath not left them trusting to it, but implanted in their own breasts a natural and obvious religion. But as we have already discoursed more opportunely on this topic, under the first and second heads of our creed, I shall say nothing more about it now. And here I think it proper to tell you, in answer to your long harangue about the duty of instructing the people, that the Deists, with a noble and disinterested compassion,

are labouring hard to rescue the people from false teachers and superstition, to deliver them from expensive and oppressive errors, that, when their minds are cleared of rubbish, the great instructor within may have free and open ground to build and plant in. But I must observe to you, that as your religion took possession of the ignorant and stupid first, and then preposterously, and directly against the process you have been so pathetically recommending, sent those ignorants to instruct their betters, ours, which begins with the great, the polite, and knowing, I hope in a little time will reach the people.

**B**UT you talked, awhile ago, concerning the inward marks of truth, by which the ignorant might distinguish the religion of the Bible from false religions; and I might here put you in mind, that this argument of yours betrays your whole cause. How can those, who have not already a right idea of God, judge whether any religion proposed to them is worthy of God, and fit to come from him? If the people have from nature and reason a right notion of God, they need no other religion; and if they have not, they can be no judges of the fitness or truth of any religion revealed to them. This is a dilemma, which I defy the ingenuity of the greatest religious artist upon earth to extricate himself from; and the difficulty upon you in this respect will be greater than upon another who never made the vulgar a judge of the internal marks of truth or falsehood in any religion.

*Shep.* Now I think there will be no difficulty at all in the business. Pray, Sir, may not God reveal himself to a person who had no idea of him before?

*Dech.* I believe he may.

*Shep.* And may he not by that revelation communicate a right idea of himself to the aforesaid person?

*Dech.* He may.

*Shep.* And, when he hath done this, may he not very naturally and easily proceed to reveal his will in all necessary points, so plainly and fully, that the person mentioned can have no doubt, either that the revelation comes from God, or that it is worthy of him?

*Temp.*

*Temp.* I think this is very easily conceived, and wholly removes the difficulty.

*Shep.* If a person who hath good eyes, but hath hitherto been kept in the dark, were suddenly removed into the open day-light, would he not see very well about him as soon as the first dazle was over?

*Dech.* Yes, surely.

*Shep.* Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, do you understand geometry?

*Dech.* A little.

*Shep.* Did you understand it before you learned it?

*Dech.* That is a very sensible question.

*Shep.* Did you understand the principles of it, before your master began to instruct you?

*Dech.* No, Sir.

*Shep.* I do not see, then, how it was possible for him, upon your way of thinking, to reveal this science to you.

*Dech.* Why, Sir, he taught me the definitions and principles first; then he laid the problems before me, and afterwards shewed me how to work out the solutions; but it was my own natural talents all the while, that enabled me to apprehend both the principles and the deductions.

*Shep.* In like manner the natural talents of man can apprehend a right notion of God, when revealed to him; and, altho' he was ignorant of that notion before, can tell him it is rational and right. Now a rational creature, having thus received a right notion of God, may afterwards judge very well, whether any religion, pretending to come from God, is in itself reasonable, and worthy of God. As to any revelation which a man receives immediately from God, the person so favoured, if he is fully satisfied the revelation comes from God, hath no room afterwards to doubt of its fitness or worthiness.

*Temp.* Nothing can be more natural or manifest, than this short process. It is easy and obvious.

*Shep.* Yes; for it is that by which all men are taught religion; and were not reason imperfect or corrupted, or byassed by prejudices, no man could be taught a false religion.



*Dech.* **R**IGHT reason then at least is to judge, whether any revelation, proposed to us at second or third hand, is worthy of God for its author.

*Shep.* It is.

*Dech.* And we are to admit of no revelation, unless God immediately proposes it to us, till we have examined it by reason, and found it rational and fit.

*Shep.* So I think.

*Dech.* Shall we then try the Christian religion by this touchstone, and see whether it does not contain such marks of unfitness, as ought to determine a rational man to reject it?

*Shep.* With all my heart.

*Dech.* There are, I think, two sorts of fitness that ought to be found in the true religion; the first in respect to its author, and the second in respect to its end.

*Shep.* You clearly conceive the matter.

*Dech.* Remember this, that when we meet to-morrow, we may resume it as a maxim, and save ourselves the trouble of repeating any part of what hath been said, in order to arrive at it.

*Shep.* I will.

*The End of the Fifth DIALOGUE.*

DIALOGUE

## D I A L O G U E VI.

DECHAINED,  
TEMPLETON,CUNNINGHAM,  
SHEPHERD.

*Dechaine.* **W**E laid it down yesterday as a sure and incontestable maxim, that right reason ought to determine in every man, whether a revelation, not proposed to him immediately by Almighty God, is worthy of so good an author; and that there are two sorts of fitnesses that ought to recommend the right religion to us, and without which we cannot, as rational beings, receive it; the first relating to him who gives it, and the second relating to its end, or the good of those to whom it is given.

*Shep.* This we agree in.

*Dech.* In the first place, then, I will further lay it down as an axiom (for I believe no-body will dispute it) that God needs neither honour, nor obedience, from his creatures, as he is infinitely perfect and happy in himself; and that he neither created any beings for his own sake, nor governs them with any view, but to their good.

*Shep.* Altho' God was moved by his own goodness, and certainly took pleasure therein, to bestow being on his creatures, when as yet there was none of them; and may be more justly said to have had that goodness, than creatures not yet in being, for the object or end of the creation; yet, as I think it too bold in man to determine and pronounce about the views of Divine providence in its incomprehensible operations, which, in respect to the time and manner of the creation, are full of unfathomable mysteries, so I choose to let you make what use you can of your daring maxim, rather than be obliged to run into the like presumption by disputing a point so much above the reach of human understanding.

*Dech.* As God is not an arbitrary Being; as he can be no-way affected by the good or evil actions of his creatures; as all he does in respect to them, is for their good alone; so we must conclude, that he could never give them any laws, but what are for their good: and, as they are free and rational beings, it is absolutely necessary, they should be sensible of the good intended them by any of his laws. The best footing, on which the duty of mankind can be put, and indeed the only rational and generous footing, is to convince them, that he is infinitely disinterested and good; that, in all he does, he seeks their happiness and comfort; that he is not, like earthly princes, jealous of his honour, nor dependent, for any part of his satisfaction, on the applauses or services of subjects so infinitely beneath him; and that anger, and wrath, and fury, passions blasphemously ascribed to him in Scripture, are storms that rage only below among the creatures, and never rise to disturb the eternal calm of a nature infinitely sublime. Such a notion of God would fill us with love for him, and consequently produce a rational and voluntary obedience. Now, the positive duties of revealed religion being things in themselves indifferent, we can never suppose, that God, who does nothing out of mere will and arbitrariness, which are never found apart from caprice and unsteadiness, could lay so useless and senseless a burden on his rational creatures. It is from the same right idea of God, that we may be sure he will never punish the violation of his laws, but ~~is~~ as to promote the main of human happiness, nay, and the happiness even of him, who suffers for such a violation.

*Shep.* Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, is God the Governor as well as Creator of the world?

*Dech.* He is.

*Shep.* Have mankind chosen him for their Governor, and prescribed him rules and laws to govern by?

*Dech.* No: his right to govern is that of a Creator; and the law he governs by is the eternal law of reason.

*Shep.* He then, in bringing us into being, hath made us his subjects.

*Dech.* He hath.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* And, being infinitely wise, knows best, what means to employ in the management of his great dominion.

*Dech.* Yes, surely.

*Shep.* Is he also a just Governor ?

*Dech.* He is infinitely just.

*Shep.* As he rules over all things in Heaven and Earth, and thro' all the worlds that adorn the far distant regions of infinite space, his government, and the preservation of it in due order and harmony, must be matters of great importance.

*Dech.* Of infinite consequence and importance.

*Shep.* The laws, then, of so wise a Governor must, in all respects, be equal to the great ends they are to answer ; and their sanctions, in particular, must bear proportion to those ends.

*Dech.* They must.

*Shep.* And to the majesty of the Legislator.

*Dech.* Yes.

*Shep.* We have now seen, that God governs by right of creation ; and, consequently, is an unlimited and uncontrollable Ruler : we have likewise seen, that he is infinitely wise, and, consequently, knows many excellent means and instruments of government, the use and efficacy of which we are unacquainted with. Further, we are agreed, that he is infinitely just, as well as wise ; that, in consequence of both, his laws must be adequate to the infinitely important ends of a boundless empire ; and that their sanctions in particular, from whence spring the force and efficacy of all laws, must be such as are sufficient to render those laws respected in that degree which is necessary, in regard to the majesty of their Author, and the good of an empire so comprehensive. Now, altho' the power of God over us is infinite and unlimited, and he hath a just right to govern us as he pleases ; yet he manifests a voluntary goodness, compelled by no rights of ours, in entering into a kind of compact with us, in fixing between himself and us that relation which subsists between a royal lawgiver and his subjects ; and governs us by those laws, the reasonableness of which he had made to result from the nature he had given us, and the situation



situation he had placed us in. Thus God, having condescended to govern the world, is, in that capacity at least, concerned to see, that his laws be duly enforced and obeyed. Howsoever indifferent the Deists may suppose him to be, as God, in reference to all our actions; yet as an equitable, nay, as a gracious governor, he may be either honoured or slighted, pleased or offended, by the behaviour of his subjects, altho' their best actions may not add to his happiness, nor their worst detract from it, in the least. An earthly prince is but little removed or exalted above his subjects, and yet he can approve the behaviour of the lowest subject, as loyal and respectful, without any sensible addition to his happiness; and condemn the contumacy of another, who is, nevertheless, too inconsiderable to give him the smallest disquiet.

*Deib.* But the Scriptures represent God as disturbed by the most violent passions, upon the misbehaviour of his subjects.

*Shep.* When God is represented to us in Scripture as jealous of his honour, and angry with the sins of men, &c. or in any other respect figured to us as a man; it is only because neither he himself, nor his approbation of virtue, nor aversion to vice, could be otherwise made intelligible, or affecting to us. *Tindal*, after drawing an argument against the Scriptures from these sort of expressions, as conveying unworthy notions of God, cannot help falling into the like himself. He tells us what will please, displease, honour, or affront Almighty God. Man is made in the image of God, and it is only by that resemblance between him and us, that we can have any notion of him at all; and therefore, when he is to speak to us, as it must be in terms, and by the help of notions, intelligible to us, it is impossible to contrive any other way, than that of metaphor and analogy. Whatever judgment or sentiment it is, that God forms upon the good actions of men, it cannot be otherwise expressed to us, than by approbation, nor strongly expressed, but by pleasure and delight. Whatever it is he thinks of sin, we faintly express it by dislike, and strongly by anger and indignation; but the cavils on this head are perfectly childish, and unworthy of an answer: God, as governor  
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of all intelligent beings, is pleased (and it is an effect of the greatest goodness) so to act, as if the obedience of men gave him pleasure, and their disobedience offence; that is, he cherishes and rewards the good, and punishes the evil; and the latter is no less an instance of his tenderness for mankind, than the former: for as the rewards of virtue prompt us to be just and beneficent to all men, so the punishments of vice deter us from iniquity and cruelty: and if we may be allowed to judge, in this matter, by experience, the latter is of more efficacy in governing the world, than the former. There is no comparison between the number of those who aspire to, and deserve, a reward, and that of those who dread and deserve punishment: it is not difficult to determine what the greatness of those rewards and punishments should be, that are to support the laws of an Almighty God and Judge, and thereby preserve the universe from ruin and misery. We have already agreed, that they ought to bear an exact proportion to the majesty of the lawgiver and governor, and to the importance of the ends proposed by the law. Now both are infinitely great, and therefore the punishments and rewards of this law ought to be infinitely great. But altho' such rewards seem consonant enough to the justice and goodness of God, yet many think infinite punishments too grievous for the sins of men. You seem, Sir, to be of this number, by your saying, as *Tindal* does, that God, in punishing even the wicked, proposes the good and happiness of him he punishes; which can never be, if the punishment is infinite.

*Dech.* I do insist, that the end of all punishment, human and divine, is not the misery or destruction of the delinquent, but in order to reformation.

*Shep.* As to human punishments, no doubt on't you are highly in the right; and he who is hanged, is in a fair way of reformation. And as to the laws of God, I am perfectly of your opinion, the last and adequate punishment, annexed to them, is in order only to reformation; but of whom? Not of the offender; for reformation, surely, cannot be a punishment, let the pain that procures it be what it will. It must be, therefore, the reformation of others, not yet ripe for justice, and  
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the preserving the good in a state of innocence, that a just and gracious God hath in view, when he eternally punishes an hardened offender. The apprehension of such a punishment will most powerfully work on all who are capable of reformation; and as to those who are not, we have already proved, in our fourth conference, that their endless perseverance in wickedness must unavoidably render the useful example of their punishment eternal. This, and nothing short of this, can give infinite force to a law of infinite importance, and make the very distant thoughts of transgressing it awful and shocking. But let us suppose the matter otherwise, and see what would be the effect. God cannot be angry at all; is in no sense injured or affected by our transgressions; will only punish the vilest delinquents so far, as to make those of them amend their behaviour in another world, who die in their sins: I appeal to the hearts of all men, whether this would not wholly defeat the good ends proposed by the law; and whether such a medicine, substituted in the place of a punishment, would not unchain the outrageous appetites and passions of mankind, and turn the world into an hell of confusion and misery. What a sight would this be, for all the other intelligent beings of the creation! To see the evil let loose upon the good, and wretched men, already too prone to wickedness, tempted to become devils, by a promise of pardon beforehand! All the laws of wise and just Legislators are intended for the suppression of the evil, and the defence and security of the good; but a law, without a penalty equal to the strong tendency to evil in many or most of the subjects, instead of being a defence to good men, would most miserably oppress them. Their respect for the law, and its author, would effectually tie up their hands, while the worst of men, with a licence prompted by hopes of impunity and reconciliation with God, would oppress and plunder, and cut their throats at discretion.

*Temp.* I remember to have heard a lady, after reading a treatise against the eternity of Hell-torments, say, she thought it a pity the lovely doctrine of the author should not be true.

*Sh.p.*

*Shep.* Yes; such an opinion hath something very soothing in it; and in that consists the danger of giving into it, and the chief argument against it: it was either the retrospect of sin, or the prospect of punishment, probably both, joined with a strong wish for more liberty to gratify her corrupt nature, which drew that loose reflection from her: but of this enough, at present. We took occasion to discuss this important topic, I think, sufficiently, when we discoursed concerning the defects of the law of nature.

*Dech.* Enough; ay, and too much, by the one half, if not by the whole. But the chief point, in my last objection to revelation, you have not touched on at all. You are afraid, I believe, of entering on the subject of positive institutions.

*Shep.* Not in the least. But as, in my opinion, no subject can be of equal consequence to us with the sanctions of God's laws, which you joined with your objections to positive duties, I thought it proper to make some observations concerning those sanctions, as a means to clear up our notions concerning the Divine Legislator, his authority, and his laws; and those observations will, I hope, lead us to a right chain of reasoning concerning positive precepts and commands. If God's authority over his rational creatures be absolute, and such as may give him a right to impose laws that are supported with infinite sanctions, it cannot be arbitrariness or tyranny in him to give us positive precepts also, especially if these positive precepts, howsoever indifferent the actions they oblige us to perform may be in themselves, are for our good. Now whatsoever injunction we are sure is laid upon us by a wise and a gracious God, we are also sure is beneficial to us. It is enough to make the observation of such a precept our duty, if we know or believe, that it is the will of God, altho' the nature of the thing should make it impossible for us to comprehend its use. Children do not always see the useful tendency of their parents injunctions, nor subjects that of social or civil laws; yet they are, nevertheless, obliged, in duty, to obey: and how much more the subjects and children of God, who cannot err, and who will never  
act



act the tyrant over us, as earthly kings and parents often do? You may remember, we agreed, a little while ago, that God, being infinitely wise, must be a better judge of the means by which his universal government is to be preserved and regulated, and the great ends of it obtained, than ignorant and fallible men. Now as laws, resulting immediately from the frame of our nature, are the first means to accomplish those ends; so there may be other secondary means, in the hands of God, which may be employed to excellent purpose, in making us more observant of the first, especially as we are a degenerate and fallen race of beings, whom the primary law itself was insufficient to restrain, and to whom, in tract of time, it became almost wholly unknown.

*Temp.* If secondary laws are to be superadded, as we are rational beings, their use ought, I should think, to be apparent; for, otherwise, they cannot so well answer the end proposed by them.

*Shep.* A patient often receives benefit from a medicine, altho' he understands not how it operates; and the physician is not accounted arbitrary for prescribing it, altho' he does not subjoin a lecture on its qualities, or virtues. But, in case the secondary or positive means are so delivered to us, that we can easily see their use and excellency, I hope it will be no longer called a mere act of power to injoin them. Now the use of the three positive duties in the Christian religion is as plain as the duties themselves, than which nothing can be more intelligible. By the first of these we are, once in seven days, called off from all our worldly pursuits and avocations, to commemorate the signal mercies of God to mankind, and inspire us with religious love; while, at the same time, his law is repeated to us, is explained in the most familiar manner by his word, and enforced by the most pathetic exhortations, by the most powerful examples, and by threats and promises of infinite weight. From this short view of the sabbath it may appear very plainly, that it is of singular use in fixing the law of God, both in the understandings and hearts of his people; and I can hardly think, that if this most excellent positive institution had been duly observed in all ages and nations  
of

of the world, mankind could have so generally lost the knowledge of the true God, and departed from his worship and service. The second positive institution of Christianity is baptism, by which a person polluted with sin, and naturally prone to the committal of it, is, by the figure of external washing, assured of pardon for his sins, and enters into a solemn compact with God, binding him, upon high and valuable considerations, to the faith and practice of a Christian. Such a compact, actually entered into, upon the most glorious promises, on God's part, binds the Divine law, in the strictest manner, upon the consciences of Christians, and lays them under an additional obligation of their own choosing, to observe the several necessary precepts of that law. Before this covenant is entered into, men may consider themselves as left at large to the irregular motions of their passions, and the uncertain dictates of a dark and corrupted nature, so that, both in respect to the knowledge of primary duties, and the obligation to perform them, this covenant must be of unspeakable use. The third and last positive institution of Christianity is that of the Eucharist, in which the sufferings and death of Christ are to be commemorated with the gratitude that is due for the highest instance of mercy and goodness that was ever vouchsafed to mankind; and to the right performance of this solemnity a thorough examination to be made by every man into his life and conversation, by the rules of God's law, is rendered necessary, and charged home upon his conscience, under the dread of a very terrible penalty. He is made sensible, by the word of God, that it is a necessary duty; and yet is cautioned by the same word, in a very alarming manner, to beware of assisting at it, after having violated the laws of God, without first reducing himself to a proper disposition to observe those laws with greater care for the future, and fortifying that disposition with the firmest resolutions he can put on. These are the ideas all Christians entertain concerning the positive duties of their religion; and, in this light, they cannot be thought either useless to those who are to observe them, or instances of a mere arbitrary disposition in him who imposes them.

*Dech.*

*Dech.* If none are Christians, but those who think in this manner of the Eucharist, this will unchristian some, who have christened many an one. But I should think, Sir, that such helps and means, towards the better observation of God's laws, as may be drawn from facts and usages in themselves indifferent, would be more prudently left to the contrivance and application of men, than that God should interfere in such matters; because, as his commands must be obeyed, if he should injoin that which is in itself indifferent, it would then become necessary; and God will not change the nature of things, which depends upon an eternal fitness. Besides, to make that necessary which was before indifferent, is to take off the minds of men from real, natural, and indispensable duties, and tempt them to put their trust in mere rites and ceremonies, easily performed, and of no intrinsic utility to mankind.

*Shep.* You seem to think God stands mightily in awe of the nature of things, altho' he made them what they are, and could have made them otherwise, if he had pleased: their natures and fitnesses depended absolutely on his will. He gave substance, and form, and fitness, to all things, according to his own will and pleasure; and may destroy or change them as he thinks proper: and as he made the things, so he gave the laws, by which they are to be preserved in due order; nor were the laws less dependent on his will, than the being and nature of those who are to observe them: so that, in respect to God, those laws which you are pleased to stile eternal and indispensable, are merely positive and arbitrary. Of this enough was said, on a former occasion.

*Dech.* I still think the laws of nature eternal, and independent on the will of God; and that, if any use could be made of mere indifferent ceremonies in religion, it would be beneath the Majesty of God to interfere in such matters: he would leave that inferior office to the appointment of men.

*Shep.* If God, by a positive institution, should greatly add to the evidence and obligation of all rational duties, would not such a work be worthy of him?

*Dech.*

*Dech.* Ay, if—But what if they be clear and strong enough, already?

*Shep.* Then, indeed, there would be no occasion for additional helps: but we see some few men, since the creation, have been ignorant of some useful truths; and the ties of nature have not been sufficient to withhold men from such actions, as it were to be wished they had let alone.

*Dech.* And this may be said, with great truth, of some few Christians too.

*Shep.* It may: but, both with respect to knowledge and practice, I hope it will appear, that Christians draw great advantages from their religion, and, particularly, from the positive part of it. If the mere want of positive duties, in religion, should chance to cut your throat or mine; we would wish, at the first sensation of the knife, that something more had been done, than mere nature could do, to make the murderer an honest and good-natured man.

*Dech.* And, pray, how could a positive institution have done that, which the eternal ties of nature were not sufficient to do?

*Shep.* The eternal ties! why, the cut-throat never considered any tie, but that of the halter; and even the terror of that was not sufficient. If such an accident, however, should really happen to you, as it possibly may, and your ghost should have leave to make an holiday, and go see the execution of him, who shot you on the high-road, or smothered you in your bed; you would, perhaps, be shocked to hear him say, that, when he was very young, he waited on a fine Gentleman, who frequently declaimed at table against positive duties, gamed himself, and made his servants work on *Sundays*; and that he, believing the gentleman, who was very sharp-sighted and judicious, knew more of that matter than the Parson, or plain folks, could be supposed to do, never troubled himself about going to church, or reading, meditating, and praying, on *Sundays*; that, by these means, he lost all the opportunities of being instructed, like other people, in his duty, and of being either exhorted to what was good, or dissuaded from  
what



what was evil; and so betook himself, first, to an idle, and then to a vicious course of life; which, as he had no lands to rack, nor tenants to oppress, he was forced to cater for upon the high-road. This, perhaps, would shock your soul, conscious to itself, that your declamations against positive duties might possibly have given occasion to the like enormities.

*Dech.* People of good manners always reason without shocking; and that argument, which is disagreeably introduced to the mind, being heard with aversion and reluctance, seldom convinces.

*Shep.* Truth, it seems, is shocking to some people, if it comes naked to them; and men may be allowed to settle such modes of behaviour, and ceremonies of conversation, as shall be prejudicial to truth, tho' God shall not be permitted to establish ceremonies of religion, that may be highly serviceable to it. Men, who are, in a great measure, ignorant both of themselves, and the tendency of many actions, know how to make great use of resolutions and vows to do, or abstain from, certain actions, in themselves indifferent. For example; a man resolves, and solemnly promises his wife, never to keep company with a certain neighbour: now altho' keeping company with this or that person is, in itself, a thing indifferent; yet, as long as the aforesaid man keeps his promise, which is purely positive, he avoids a strong temptation to drunkenness, which the conversation of his neighbour threw in his way. If, therefore, a man can see so far, and turn a perfectly indifferent action so greatly to his own advantage, we may be sure an all-knowing God, who adds Divine authority to whatsoever he orders, can better choose and enforce such means. Iron is, by its own nature, no way qualified to cure the tooth-ach; but, when made into a pullikin, becomes an instrument of great efficacy against that violent pain. A shrewd old farmer left his lands to his eldest son, on this condition, that the young man should every day of his life say his prayers, a little before sun-rising, at a certain bush, that grew on the top of an high hill near his house; and, in case he should once fail of so doing, he willed his farm to a younger son.

*Dech.* A wise sort of a will no doubt on't!

*Shep.* This injunction, however, of the old farmer, was purely positive. It could, in itself, neither gratify the old man, nor serve his son. But then, you must understand, the farmer knew his eldest son to be a little indolent in his temper, a lover of sleep, and fond of his bed in the morning: he knew, also, that from the bush, on the top of the hill, he could have a prospect of his whole concern; and could from thence examine, whether all things were as they should be; whether his cattle were grazing in their proper pastures, or had broken into his corn; whether his fences were in good order, and his servants and labourers preparing for the business of the day. This apologue may serve to shew, that actions, indifferent in themselves, can be applied to good purpose, in reminding us of, or prompting us to others, productive, by their own nature, of our real good. The happiness of ourselves and others, and the glory of God, constitute the great end, at which all our actions ought to be aimed, as the means of attaining that end; and as soon as any action appears conducive thereunto, whether by nature or institution, it becomes our duty or interest to perform it. Let me now, Sir, put you in mind, at the close of our reasonings on this head, that all those nations, to whom the light of true revelation did not extend, have, instead of contenting themselves with what you call the perfect law of nature, contrived, or, at least, admitted, an endless variety of positive rites and ceremonies, all of them absurd, and superstitious to the last degree, and most of them shockingly corrupt and wicked; tending to authorize, by the supposition of a Divine Authority, the vilest and most abominable practices, tending to debauch the minds of men, and discipline them to vices of the grossest nature: witness those of *Bacchus*, *Venus*, *Adonis*, &c. The experience of all ages since the creation shews us, that reason, with all the refinements of philosophy, was unable to reform these horrible abuses: as it is also plain from experience, that mankind must have outward rites, of some sort or other, to fix their attention, and give, as it were, a visible body to religion, I think those of God's appointment

pointment are the only preservatives against such as the superstition, or corruption, or craft of man may contrive, and find means to establish in the world. Thus, Sir, having, I think, clearly made out, that positive institutions may be of great use, as means and helps towards the increase of necessary knowledge, and the performance of duties in themselves expedient; and that the positive duties of the Christian religion are apparently conducive, in an high degree, towards those ends; since the general doctrine, on this head, is sufficiently established, I hope I need not lose time in shewing, that the prohibition given to our first parents, in respect to the eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, together with the positive injunctions of the *Jewish* law, may be easily accounted for by the same principles and reasonings. God hath certainly a right to lay on his creatures and subjects what commands he pleases; his infinite wisdom can go much farther in contriving expedients and helps to duty, than human penetration can follow in accounting for them; and his goodness is such, that we have as great reason to resign ourselves chearfully to his dispensations of that attribute, as dutifully to those of his justice and power.

*Temp.* An examination into the positive duties, given to mankind before our Saviour's coming, would draw us out into too great a length, and hinder an inquiry concerning points more within the power of reason to account for, and, perhaps, more necessary to be known. In the mean time, as my conviction is, perhaps, in a good measure, kindly intended by you both, in the management of this debate; I think I ought to declare my sentiments between you, as often as I find them settled to my intire satisfaction. As to the subject then of our last inquiry, I believe God to be an absolute, but not, in the common acceptation of the word, an arbitrary being; I believe he hath a right to deal by all his creatures as he thinks proper; and herein does his goodness, in my opinion, manifest itself towards us, that while he is compelled by no superior power, nor obliged by a coercive or penal law, to give us either being, or the means of happiness, he is graciously pleased to bestow  
both

both upon us. In consequence of this, mankind must be highly impious and foolish, if they presume to arraign the justice of his injunctions. He hath, certainly, a most absolute and plenary right to prescribe the rules of our duty; and, therefore, every command, whether natural or positive, nay, altho' it should be directly against nature, which we know or believe to proceed from him, we are bound, in conscience, to obey. If he reverses, or repeals, or dispenses with, his own commands, as he is supremely wise and powerful, an intire resignation of our wills to his is undoubtedly due, on our part: and how far the prodigious changes (to which an empire, consisting of free and fallible beings, may be subject) shall at any time render a reversal or dispensation of God's laws, or an addition to them, expedient, we are utterly unable to determine; and, therefore, must leave that matter to the incomprehensible schemes of Divine Wisdom. Should God, on any occasion, change his commands, which he must surely have a more unquestionable right to do than any earthly Legislator; it would not argue arbitrariness nor fickleness in him, according to the mere assertion of Lord Shaftesbury, echoed by Mr. Tindal; because, even upon the principles of the Deists themselves, he is esteemed a foolish or bad man, who does not act according to the circumstances he is in, and change his conduct as his situation varies. So God, if he were obliged to act by the same law as they say he is, would most grossly transgress that law, did he persevere precisely in the same measures with an innocent, a sinful, and a repenting world.

*Dech.* **P**R'ythee, *Templeton*, consider, that if you leap so plumb into all the Parson's sentiments, he will believe you are only bantering him. He heard, before he saw you, that you were beginning to think freely; and now that he finds you suffer him to slip the bridle so quietly over your ears, and mount you, he will be apprehensive it is only in order to take some freakish fling, and throw him in the dirt. He may assure himself, I know well enough how to make you do it; and I give him fair warning to hold fast, and

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keep himself firm in his new seat, or the affair of mysteries which I am going to touch on, will turn his tame ambler into a very resty jade.

*Temp.* If thinking freely, and closing with reason, whenever I am so happy as to get a single sight on't, which you have often recommended to me in the strongest terms, should open my mind to truth, tho' in the mouth of a Parson, I hope you will not endeavour to frustrate the ingenuous effects of your own repeated advice, by turning me into ridicule merely for reducing it to practice.

*Shep.* You need not fear it. Mr. *Decbaine* is fond of humour, and he does not intend to use his raillery, which flows merely from his particular turn of mind, as an obstruction to your freedom of thought. Neither he, nor his cause, stand in need of jests or artifice, or any aids, foreign to reason. Besides, a little humour now-and-then helps to enliven a conversation of this kind, and hinders it from degenerating into a dry dispute; to which, from the nature of the subject, it is perhaps a little too inclinable. But I long to enter on the subject of mysteries, because the Gentleman seems to promise something uncommon upon that topic.

*Decb.* A Religion, as we have already observed, that really comes from God, can never be supposed to injoin the belief of absurdities, impossibilities, or contradictions. If we know any thing of God, we must know, that nothing but truth and reason can proceed from a Being infinitely wise; and that he is too good to put the salvation of his creatures on a faith in such doctrines, as shock that reason, which he hath implanted in the minds of all men, to be their monitor and adviser, in respect to every thing that is proposed to their understandings. Were a proposition never so true, or consistent in itself, if, however, it were such, as must appear absurd or contradictory to the reason of all men, God would never require the belief of it from any person, much less from all the world. But that which is highly derogatory to God, and utterly impossible in itself, it is downright blasphemy to say, God could ever affirm<sup>r</sup>

affirm it, or ever require the belief of it. To reveal, is the same thing as to explain, or discover; but to reveal a mystery, so as to leave it still a mystery, is a flat contradiction in terms, and a great solecism; it is an explication that wraps up, and involves, what it pretends to unfold, a discovery that conceals. Besides, if the mysterious points, supposed to be revealed, are purely speculative, and of no effect towards moral practice; such a revelation could be made to no other end, but to try how far mankind could carry their faith, and to set him upon the highest footing of merit, who could most divest himself of reason. To suppose God capable of proceeding thus with his rational creatures, is to make him contradict himself; for, if he tells us one thing by the voice of reason, and the very reverse by that of revelation, if he gives us a natural rule and measure for truth, and then places our duty to himself in firmly believing that which is directly contrary to that rule, does he not deal very hardly by us? Surely God can never set up opposite standards of truth in the same mind, nor turn belief directly in the teeth of knowledge. He who thinks him capable of this, and would propagate such an idea of him, does him, in my opinion, but little honour.

*Cunn.* All this I believe Mr. *Shepherd*, and every other rational man, will readily grant.

*Temp.* There is no denying it.

*Dech.* Be assured on't, *Shepherd* will not only deny, but refute it all.

*Shep.* As I see you cannot agree about my sentiments in this matter, what if I should try to express them myself?

*Dech.* Say on.

*Shep.* I can subscribe to all you have said but this, that to reveal a mystery, so as to leave it still a mystery, is a contradiction in terms. A truth, which we did not know before, may be revealed to us, without such an explication of that truth, as may enable us to account for the consistency, either of the notions or terms, by which it is conveyed. A *Negro*, for example, who was never out of *Guiney*, may be told by an *European*, that

the surface of the waters in northern countries is often as hard as some kinds of stone; that this is owing to the frost, or cold; and that as soon as the weather becomes warm, the water recovers its fluidity. The *Negro*, who was utterly ignorant of this surprising fact, may easily understand what is said to him concerning it, altho' he is almost as much in the dark as ever about the precise meaning of the word *frost*, or, at least, about the nature of the thing, for which it stands. He is told a truth he did not know before; but that truth is nevertheless an incomprehensible and unaccountable mystery to him: nay, it is the same to us too, and was to *Newton* himself, who beheld the phenomenon with his own eyes. But we interrupted Mr. *Dechaine*, who was going, I believe, to shew us, that there are certain articles in the Christian faith, which, being absurd or contradictory in themselves, or useless to us, could never, according to the premisses he hath laid down, have been recommended to the belief of mankind by that wise Being, who gave us a faculty to defend us against absurd and false opinions concerning himself, and our duty, more especially.

*Dech.* This is the very thing I was about to do. I might reckon up a good number of tenets, believed by all or most Christians, upon the strength of a supposed revelation from God, which my premisses would prove altogether unworthy of such an author; but I shall content myself with two only, because they are esteemed as necessary articles of faith; and because, if those two can be justified, the rest, or any thing, tho' never so strange and unreasonable, may be justified by the same arguments; I mean the Incarnation, and the Trinity. As to the first, it shocks reason with the very sound of it. A God incarnate, a divine man, or an human God, are strange expressions. We laugh at the Heathen for giving the Deity so many children, who were gods by the father's, and men by the mother's side. Yet the incarnation of Christ differs not in the least from that of *Bacchus* and *Hercules*. God, we all believe, is omnipresent; and, as the Scripture itself saith, dwelleth not in temples made with hands: How then can he dwell in, or be confined

to

to, an human body? If God is equally present everywhere, he dwells in every man, as well as in Christ. We are told in one part of Scripture, that *the heaven of heavens cannot contain him*; and yet in another it is said, that he was manifested in the flesh, and dwelt with all the fulness of Deity in Christ Jesus. These matters, Mr. *Shepherd*, are not only inconceivable, but irreconcilable and contradictory.

*Temp.* If the Scriptures were to be understood, as most Christians, and as you here, seem to interpret them, they could hardly be acquitted of gross absurdity, and palpable contradiction. But the passages you refer to, and all the rest, usually brought to support the doctrine of the Incarnation, may, I hope, admit of a rational, tho' figurative interpretation, which will not conclude in a doctrine so alien to common sense.

*Dech.* I told you, *Shepherd*, I knew how to set *Templeton* and you together by the ears. You went hand in hand over rocks and mountains, with many a large stride; but we are now come to a gulph, over which poor *Templeton* cannot leap. Lend him an hand, *Shepherd*; and try if you and he can agree about the interpretation of Scripture, in this important point. You may remember, you both thought the Scriptures very intelligible a little while ago, in all matters of moment. You and I, *Cunningham*, have some business to settle in *Holland*. I believe we may go so far, or even to *China*, and return time enough to hear of their agreement.

*Cunn.* I don't know but we might.

*Dech.* However, I will stay awhile, and see fair play between the two combatants. Altho' the young man is pretty well equipped for this engagement, yet his adversary is crafty, and may take some advantage of his simplicity. A Deist may make a very good moderator between an orthodox and a *Socinian* Christian, being far enough, I am sure, from any inclination to either side.

*Shep.* Well, Mr. *Templeton*, I am pleased with the footing Mr. *Dechaine* hath put the examination of this point on, as I believe you will be more sparing of your wit; and, far from triumphing over me before you



have subdued me, you will even scorn to do it after. Pray, Mr. *Templeton*, what is a mystery?

*Dech.* So; he is at his questions again.

*Temp.* As I care but little in what sense that word is taken, intending to make no use of it in the present debate, you may define it, if you please, and think it will be of any service to you.

*Shep.* But, since the Scripture applies the word *mystery* immediately to the Incarnation of Christ, you ought to know the meaning of the word as well as I: yet I confess, as I intend to draw some consequences from that meaning, I ought to shew in what sense it is to be understood. We are at present no-way concerned with the various senses, in which this word is used, either in Scripture, or other antient originals; but only with that more eminent meaning giving to it, when it is applied to the two doctrines under consideration; wherefore in that only I shall define it. A *mystery* then, in this acceptance, is an article of our faith, which we should never have had the least idea of, if it had not been revealed to us; and now that it is revealed, altho' we can perfectly well understand the article or proposition, yet we can neither find in that proposition itself, nor from our own reason, nor by any other means, a solution for certain difficulties contained in it, or following from it.

*Temp.* You have a right to mean by that, or any other word, what you please. But as to words used by an author, if you undertake to give his sense in any passage, you must define the words he expresses himself by in that passage, provided you, and the person you would instruct, or refute, should happen to differ about the sense of those words; and, after giving the definition, it will be farther incumbent on you to shew, that your definition does justice to the author. I desire, therefore, to know the meaning of the word *mystery* used by St. *Paul* to *Timothy*, in this passage, *Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh.*

*Shep.* A mystery, in the scriptural sense, and as the word is there used by St. *Paul*, is such a proposition as I have defined just now; which man, of himself, could not know, and which, after God hath revealed it to him,

him, he can easily understand, but cannot possibly account for.

*Temp.* But how does this appear to be the meaning of the word, as used by *St. Paul* in the passage under consideration?

*Shep.* I believe you will allow the word mystery always to signify, both in Scripture and common acceptation, something known to few, or in itself hard to be understood.

*Temp.* I will.

*Shep.* Does not *St. Paul* in this place speak of something very hard to be understood, when he calls it a great mystery?

*Temp.* I believe he may; but how does it appear, that he speaks in that place of the Incarnation of God?

*Shep.* He says, *God was manifested in the flesh*; and that he speaks of this manifestation, as made in the person of Christ, is plain, because he proceeds, and says, *He, namely, God manifest in the flesh, was justified in the spirit, seen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory*. Here, Sir, it is plain, beyond all contradiction, that he who was justified, seen, preached, believed on, and received up into glory, was Jesus Christ, and at the same time God manifested in the flesh. This was the great mystery, the point impossible to be accounted for, tho' easily enough understood.

*Cunn.* Our translators have, in all probability, rendered this passage in a wrong sense, following the manuscripts and comments that favoured the doctrine of the Incarnation; but the *Vulgate* and *Syriac* translations, instead of applying, *was manifested*, to God, apply it to the *mystery of Godliness*; and, therefore, we may be sure their authors, instead of *Ἰεσὺς*, must have read *ὁ*, so that the true rendering ought to be, *Great is the mystery of godliness, which was manifested in the flesh, &c.*

*Shep.* But all the Greek copies, except one, and the Greek interpreters, read *Ἰεσὺς*; and the *Arabic* version in the *Polyglott* Bible agrees thereunto. These authorities are vastly superior to that of the two translations you mention. See *Pearson* on the Creed, in relation to this

text, in the second article. But no authorities in this matter can be of any consequence, if they make nonsense of the whole passage. If we are to understand, that the mystery of godliness, or the Gospel, was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, and received up into glory, we can conceive nothing more absurd. A mystery incarnate, a mystery justified, or a mystery taken up from the earth into Heaven, and there glorified, would be such expressions as common sense can never allow of. What think you, Mr. *Templeton*? Could the Spirit of God thus express himself?

*Tamp.* I cannot tell what to say to this.

*Dech.* I am apt to believe you. Did I not often tell you, that, if you received the Bible as the word of God, you must swallow such absurdities as these with a wide throat? *Shepherd* hath rightly enough defined the word mystery, as used by St. *Paul* in this place; and it cannot be denied, that St. *Paul* actually asserts the Incarnation of God therein, and hangs a mill-stone about the neck of your faith, which you can never rid yourself of, but by shaking off that faith itself.

*Shep.* I agree with Mr. *Dechaine*, that not only the Incarnation, but the Trinity, is so plainly set forth in Scripture, that he, who cannot believe them both, is utterly without any relief, but that of disbelieving the Scriptures altogether. The expressions, by which those mysteries are asserted in Scripture, are so many, and so strong, that we cannot, by any subtilty of distinction, or violence of interpretation, clear the scriptural writers of either a gross mistake, or a wilful scheme to lead the world into idolatry, if the doctrine of the Incarnation, and of the Trinity, be not founded on truth.

*Dech.* This, I think, is very evident; and therefore, Mr. *Templeton*, as the knot is too intricate to be untied, you must either cut it, or pocket it up. It will be in vain to quote those passages of Scripture, where Christ is spoken of as a creature, or a mere man; for *Shepherd* hath a salvo for all those expressions, and will tell you they are said of Christ, as he is a man; and, besides, will be forced to own, that if one passage of Scripture contradicts another in a point of such high importance,  
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it will effectually throw to the ground the whole authority of Scripture.

*Shep.* That I shall indeed, without any force at all.

*Temp.* And pray, Sir, do you think you can clear the doctrines of the Incarnation, and the Trinity, of absurdity and contradiction? Is it possible for you, or all the world, to answer the objections Mr. *Dechaine* hath brought against those doctrines?

*Shep.* I think it is a very possible, nay, a very easy matter, to do it.

*Temp.* You undertake largely, I must say that for you. Yet hitherto, I own, you have so well supported some very extraordinary positions, that I am not sure you will fail even in this.

*Dech.* Yes, he is a great undertaker; but every tradesman, you know, speaks largely of what he can perform in the way of his craft.

*Shep.* Look ye, Gentlemen, I do not undertake to refute your objections to your satisfaction. That may be too hard a task; but I think I have reasons sufficient to overturn them.

*Temp.* Come then, let us hear them. I can honestly assure you, Sir, I have no prejudices against your opinions, nor in favour of Mr. *Dechaine's* objections. I only look for truth with as honest an affection as any of her more sagacious wooers was ever warmed with towards her; and therefore shall be determined by reason. Of this I have already given Mr. *Shepherd* some convincing proofs.

*Shep.* Mr. *Dechaine*, if I well remember, argued, that absurd, impossible, and useless doctrines could never come from God, nor the belief of them be required of man. This I granted him; but that the doctrine of the Incarnation deserves such epithets, I cannot yet allow. Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, is God omnipotent?

*Dech.* Yes.

*Shep.* Can he do every thing that does not imply a contradiction?

*Dech.* Yes, every thing that does not imply a contradiction, either in itself, or to his own nature.



*Shep.* Is there any contradiction in saying he can join a rational soul to an organized body?

*Dech.* None at all.

*Shep.* If he can join a body and a soul together, which are of natures so heterogeneous and opposite, that they cannot of themselves act upon one another, may he not be able to join two spirits together, which are of natures more similar?

*Dech.* He may.

*Shep.* He may then be able, for ought we know to the contrary, to join the soul or spirit of man to himself.

*Dech.* Not so as to make but one person of both; such an identification I take to be impossible.

*Shep.* You may take it to be so; but I am sure you cannot prove it. A thorough knowledge of God, and of a rational soul, is necessary to such a proof, and you know either but very imperfectly.

*Dech.* But God is omnipresent, and cannot be so joined to a limited soul, as that he shall be confined with it to one body.

*Shep.* No man ever said he could, and all I insist on is the possibility of a personal union between the Divine nature, and an human soul. Shew that to be impossible, and I have done.

*Dech.* Why, if God be present every-where, he must be in all men; and so the personal identification you speak of, may subsist between him and every man.

*Shep.* Be pleased to shew, Sir, that he cannot be personally united to one man, because he is intimately present to another.

*Dech.* I cannot tell what you mean by a personal union between the Divine and human nature.

*Shep.* I believe you can't tell how such an union can be brought about, and therein consists all your difficulty; because you cannot conceive the manner, you will not believe the thing. But to say a thing is impossible, because you cannot comprehend how it should be, is the same as to say it is impossible for the fire to warm you, because you cannot tell how it does it. But you said among other things, that the very sound of such words, as a God incarnate, shocks reason; and in the same breath made

made mention of *Bacchus* and *Hercules*, whom the Heathen believed to be gods incarnate. Had reason been so clear in this matter, as you would have us believe, it could never have suffered a notion to gain ground, and possess the minds of so many nations, nay, and of *Julian* himself, who says, that *Jupiter* begot *Æsculapius* out of his own proper substance, and sent him down to *Epidaurus* to heal the distempers of mankind. Reason did not hinder *Spinosa*, *Blount*, and many other modern philosophers, from asserting, that God may have a body; or rather, that the universe, or the matter of the universe, is God. Pray is not reason given us for an universal director?

*Dech.* It is.

*Shep.* And does it direct most clearly in matters of the greatest moment; or does it leave us more in the dark about them, and give us its plainest dictates concerning things of little or no consequence?

*Dech.* Its dictates are plainest in respect to things of the highest moment to us. God, having given us that for our only director, hath rendered it adequate to the great ends for which it was given.

*Shep.* It follows evidently then, either that it is a thing of no consequence to us whether the Incarnation of God be believed or not; or, at least, that reason can see no impossibility in it, since so many nations believed the Incarnation of *Jupiter* himself, whom they took for the supreme God.

*Dech.* But they did not look upon their *Jupiter* to be omnipresent.

*Shep.* That, indeed, is an attribute of the Divine nature, which the modern Philosophers are beholden to the Scriptures for: yet *Plato*, and some other antient Philosophers, who sometimes call the Deity *Zeüs*, ascribe omnipresence to him. But surely, if reason could not furnish them with right notions of God, and if, from the wrong notions which it suffered them to entertain of him, they thought it possible for him to have a body, we may from thence draw this conclusion at least, that reason, which, according to you, is our only and perfect guide, especially in matters of the highest moment, was not so

sensibly shocked at the notion of an incarnate Deity, as you seem to think ; and yet that notion of theirs was attended with very important consequences ; and it behoved their unerring guide to have made the impossibility of a Divine Incarnation evident to every single man of them, upon the first suggestion of it to their thoughts. But, having in vain called on you to demonstrate to us the impossibility of God's personal union with a man ; and having shewn, by an appeal to experience, that reason, instead of being utterly averse to the notion of a Divine Incarnation, hath easily enough admitted that notion, and suffered it to pass, almost without contradiction, upon the most philosophical nations in the world ; I will now endeavour, as briefly as the nature of the thing will permit, to shew, that the Incarnation of God, as set forth in the Holy Scriptures, is a point of faith not only useful, but essential, to religion. A religion, that does not tell us what will please or displease God, tells us nothing ; and a religion, that can neither bind us firmly to our duty, nor afford us rational hopes of pardon from God, after we have acted against the rules of our duty, is an hideous religion, that serves only for condemnation. All men, who believe there is a God, believe also, that he governs the world with infinite justice, and will punish the sins of men with a severity proportionable, as we have already observed, to the important ends of his law ; which are no less than the happiness of all intelligent beings, and the conservation of the whole rational world. Now it was formerly proved, that, as all men are conscious to themselves of many and great transgressions against the law of God, they must be left to the most fearful expectations, to an eternal sense of guilt and despair, if some means of reconciliation with God have not been provided, and made known to them. Give me leave briefly to recapitulate here, what was more fully handled in our fourth conference, when we discussed the subject of atonement ; for the considerations there offered are absolutely necessary to clear up the present point. What means God might have made use of for this purpose, we know not : but we know he is infinitely just, and, as such, will inflict an equivalent punishment for the breach

breach of his law. We know also, that he is infinitely compassionate; and, of consequence, as desirous to forgive, as he is just to punish. How then? Shall he punish pursuant to the dictates of his infinite justice? If he does, there is no room for mercy. Shall he listen only to his mercy, and give an universal pardon? If he does, his justice is intirely laid aside, and an universal temptation to sin thrown in the way of all his intelligent creatures by the assurance of a full pardon. His infinite justice and mercy extend alike to all our transgressions; the one pleading for a plenary forgiveness, and the other urging the necessity of an adequate punishment. Here, Sir, is a difficulty, which no lights of nature, as I formerly observed to you, nor all the wisdom of the highest Angels in Heaven, are able to help us over. But the infinite wisdom of God found out an expedient, by which both the justice and mercy of God could be satisfied. The Second Person in the Holy Trinity, being of the same nature with the First, or the Father, and consequently capable of making an atonement of sufficient dignity for the sins of the whole world, took on him the soul and body of a man, and, in our offending nature, suffered a punishment equal, in the sight of his infinitely affectionate Father, to all the penalties annexed to the Divine law. Before this mystical plan of our redemption was discovered to us, no force of created wisdom could have pointed out any rational means of our salvation. We were all debtors to the law, and justice must have taken place. The sacrifices of the antient *Jews* and *Gentiles*, having no value in themselves, could never take away sin, any further than as they were offered up instead of the grand sacrifice expected. Nor could any created being, tho' of the brightest order, have made an atonement for sins committed by his fellow-creatures against the infinite majesty of God, and those awful and important laws, on the strict observation of which the due order and happiness of the whole rational world depended. But now that this scheme of redemption hath been revealed to us, we are equally struck with astonishment at the wisdom and goodness manifested in it. Man, if he acts up to the terms of reformation, on which this glorious method of reconciliation

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with God is proposed, hath comfortable hopes afforded him of peace and restoration." Angels and men, who behold this stupendous work of our redemption, more glorious than the most wonderful creation, are filled with infinite love towards its merciful and gracious Author, who grappled with such dreadful agonies, and stooped so low to lift his unhappy creatures from sin and misery. Nor have they less reason to adore and fear the justice of God, and tremble at the heinous nature of sin, when they see, that nothing, but the blood and death of the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of God could make atonement for the latter, and satisfy Divine vengeance. The man, who reflects but ever so little on the natural effects of such a sight as this, will perceive, that nothing can be set before the eyes of men and Angels, so likely to fill them with the love and fear of God, and, consequently, to recall them to their duty, or preserve them in it. And thus, Sir, I have proved the belief of our Saviour's Incarnation to be no unuseful article of our faith; at least, I hope I have proved it to you, Mr. *Templeton*, who admit, I believe, the other essentials of our religion, with which this of the Incarnation hath a necessary coherence.

*Temp.* By no means. You have founded all you have said, upon a personal distinction in the Divine Nature, which you have not yet proved.

*Dech.* It is well observed; and I cannot help taking notice, that nothing can be more ridiculous, than to argue from points not yet established, and impossible to be made out, as if they were so many incontestable maxims.

*Shep.* I own it is so; but you are to blame for that, who threw me into the preposterous method, by proposing your objections to the Incarnation before those with which you intend to attack the doctrine of the Trinity: however, it will all come to the same thing in the end, if you cannot shew, that a distinction of persons in the Divine Nature is impossible or absurd.

*Dech.* Altho' I see you are for laying the difficulty of the proof always upon me; and whereas it is more incumbent on you to defend your own notions, than on me

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to shew the impossibility of their truth ; yet we have, in this matter, so plain and open a field, that I can safely venture to lead the way.

*Shep.* I desire no more of you than you undertook of your own accord ; namely, to shew that the doctrine of the Trinity, being inconsistent in itself, and with truth, could never have come from God.

*Dech.* **D**O you believe there is but one God ?

*Shep.* One only.

*Dech.* Do you believe he is good, and will deal with his creatures according to the nature he hath given them ?

*Shep.* I believe him to be infinitely good ; and that he will never require impossibilities of them.

*Dech.* Is it not impossible for men to believe a palpable contradiction ?

*Shep.* It is impossible for men to believe a contradiction, which they know to be such.

*Dech.* If, then, there is but one God, there cannot be three Persons in the Divine Nature ; for all persons are individual and distinct beings, having each of them a separate consciousness, and a distinct will.

*Shep.* Such persons, as we know, are so distinguished ; but can you prove it impossible, that there can be two or more distinct persons, who have the same will and consciousness ? Or can you demonstrate, that, in the same soul or spirit, there cannot possibly be more than one will, and one consciousness ? Or are you able clearly to prove, that, because the personality of a man consists in will or consciousness ; there cannot, therefore, be any other sort of personality ? In respect of the Divine Nature, the human is but a faint similitude or shadow, in the faculties and personalities of which, certain attributes, and other distinctions in God, are dimly represented ; yet so as to furnish a basis for all that knowledge of God, which is necessary to us in our present condition. When we speak of God, we must use such ideas as the human mind, and such words as human language, afford us. Now man not being of the same, but only of a similar nature with God, we cannot think or speak of God immediately and properly,

perly, according to his incomprehensible nature, but only by the analogy of our nature to his : For example, when we say God is wise, we mean, he knows all things ; but we do not mean, that he knows, as man does, by the help of senses, and long deductions of reason. So, when we say there are three Persons in God, we do not apply the word Person in the same proper and immediate sense to him, in which we understand it when speaking of men ; but we use it as the only term known to us, by which the distinction of the Divine Nature, set forth to us in Holy Scripture, can be expressed. In like manner, when we call the first Person in Scripture, Father, and the second Son, we do not mean that the relation between these two Persons in God is the same, in all respects, with the relation between an human father, and his son ; but that the relation between the aforesaid Divine Persons, having a greater analogy with that of father and son among men, is better expressed by it, than by any other human relation. Now, Sir, it lies upon you to demonstrate, that there cannot be a distinction in the Divine Nature analogous to that of persons among men.

*Dech.* Is God omnipresent ?

*Shep.* He is.

*Dech.* Then it cannot be said of him, in any sense, that he moves from place to place, or that one part of his nature is here, and another there ; because he fills infinite space. It follows, therefore, that, if the Father be God, and the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God ; the Son could not have come from the Father, nor return to the Father ; nor could the Holy Ghost have proceeded from both ; for this would be the same thing as to say, that God can come from God ; and return to, or proceed from God.

*Shep.* When we speak of God's presence, we mean by it something analogous to our own, of which we have no clear idea ; for the presence of a soul in place, which takes up no place, is a thing that cannot be perfectly conceived or explained. Many persons may be all present at once in a room, and any one of them may go from one person to another person, and return again, without ceasing to be present in the said room.

*Dech.*

*Dech.* But none of those persons fills the whole room, much less do they all, or every one of them.

*Shep.* No; nor can it be properly said, that the soul of any one among them, which constitutes his person, fills any part or place of the room: yet it would be a contradiction to common sense to say, he is not personally present somewhere, or even to another, who is at some distance from him in the same room. If, then, we cannot have a clear idea of our own presence, but are obliged to express it by a mere analogy to matter and our bodies, which occupy space; how shall we comprehend the presence of God, whose manner of filling infinite space is wholly unknown to us? God may manifest himself in one place more than another, and in different places at different times, which, to make it the more intelligible to us, may be expressed by going from place to place: yet the real nature and manner of his presence cannot be properly either conceived or described by us. Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, is God incomprehensible?

*Dech.* He is.

*Shep.* Can you, then, demonstrate, from his unity, or omnipresence, which you conceive but analogously and imperfectly, that there cannot be such a distinction in his incomprehensible nature, as may be figured and represented to us by the personal distinction of man from man?

*Dech.* I cannot conceive any manner of distinction in a being so perfectly one, and simple.

*Shep.* Nor I; but does it follow, that, because we cannot conceive or comprehend the manner of a distinction in one incomprehensible nature, there cannot possibly be any? You will own, I believe, that there is but one soul in a man: Are you able to conceive the distinction between the will and judgment of your own soul?

*Dech.* I can perceive, that I judge first, and then will; and here, I think, is a clear distinction.

*Shep.* That is only between the acts of judging and willing; but can you perceive the distinction between the  
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the faculty by which you judge, and that by which you will?

*Dech.* I know not whether I have two distinct faculties, or one only, that serves for both purposes.

*Shep.* Is it possible, that you, who know not but there may be such a distinction in one human soul, should not be able to conceive the possibility of some distinction in the nature of God, which you know infinitely less of? Do you know how your soul acts upon your body, or how your body reacts upon, or is moved and affected by, your soul, when soul and matter are, by their own nature, incapable of union or contact, or mutual operation upon each other?

*Dech.* I cannot tell how far matter may be rarefied and sublimed, nor in what degree a spirit may be condensed, as it were, and rendered tangible.

*Shep.* Is not matter, tho' never so highly rarefied, still matter, as much as steel, or adamant?

*Dech.* It is.

*Shep.* Is spirit capable of condensation? Or can it be materialized?

*Dech.* I cannot tell; I believe not.

*Shep.* Can matter move itself, or is it inert, as the philosophers say; and indifferent to rest or motion?

*Dech.* It is certainly indifferent to both.

*Shep.* Is it not still more evident, that it is incapable of freedom and choice? If it cannot move at all, you will readily grant, I believe, that it cannot choose which way it will move.

*Dech.* That I shall readily grant.

*Shep.* But you can contract your finger, or stretch it out; can you not?

*Dech.* Yes; just as I please.

*Shep.* There must be somewhat, therefore, beside matter, in you.

*Dech.* Who questions it? It is my soul that moves my finger.

*Shep.* But the difficulty recurs again; for pure spirit cannot act on matter. These points, however, are too high for us; and man cannot comprehend himself. Let us try the extent of our comprehension in things inferior  
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to us. Do you know how that little fly, in the window, was generated? How its food nourishes it? How it moves its wings? and what determines each of those seemingly irregular flights it makes, from side to side?

*Dech.* I do not.

*Shep.* Well, that is an animal, and, consequently, of a nature too high for the comprehension of us, who are but animals ourselves. There is the leaf of a rose; can you tell us how it was unfolded from the bud? How the bud was protruded from the tree? or how the tree itself sprung from a small slip, or seed?

*Dech.* No, indeed.

*Shep.* A vegetable is a very curious and delicate piece of machinery, and may be too fine and subtil for your understanding: but here is a piece of silver; you can easily tell us, by what power or quality its parts cohere more firmly than those of the rose-leaf I shewed you. It is no difficult matter for you, also, to tell us, how its extension, solidity, whiteness, and other qualities, adhere to its substance; and what that substance is.

*Dech.* I know nothing of the matter.

*Shep.* You surprise me! I imagined you, who could tell us, so peremptorily, what there may, and what there may not, be in God, could have given us a clear and perfect account of things so infinitely below him, and which it must be so much easier to comprehend.

*Dech.* All this is little to the purpose. In ourselves, and things about us, we see many qualities and effects; and tho' we know nothing of their natures or causes, we have, by sense and experience, a certainty of the effects themselves: whereas the doctrine of the Trinity is not only unaccountable in itself, but founded, also, on mere report and hearsay; to which we cannot trust as confidently, as to the testimony of our senses.

*Shep.* This is flying back to the authority of the Scriptures, from whence we learn that doctrine, and not proving the impossibility of a personal distinction in God, from the knowlege of his nature, which is what you undertook to demonstrate.

*Dech.* But if I prove that doctrine to be contradictory in itself, that, surely, will suffice.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* It will.

*Dech.* Do not the Scriptures, or the Catholic faith, as you call it, bid you believe that *the Father is God, and the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God?*

*Shep.* They do.

*Dech.* And each of these Persons is apart, and by himself, called God. Now I say, no expression can more strongly set forth, that there are three Gods, in direct contradiction to the first article of your own Creed, that there is but one God.

*Shep.* What you say might, perhaps, be true, if that distinction in the Divine Nature, which makes an article of our faith, and which we express by Persons, was precisely the same as that between man and man. But you don't consider what I just now hinted to you; that the first is represented to our minds by a similitude or resemblance to the latter, which resemblance or analogy we are forced to make use of, when we say God is a Spirit, and the soul of man a Spirit: for whatever difference there is between the Divine and human Personality, there is the same between the Divine and human Spirit: yet, be that difference never so considerable, the analogy between them is such, as to furnish the only ground-work, and that a sufficient one, for all our knowledge of, and reasonings about God. But whatever sense may be forced from the words of our Creed, you cannot say, that Christians understand by them, that there are three Gods, since they all maintain, that there is but one. Now I hope, Sir, that our present dispute is not about words, but meanings; and, if it is, it must necessarily resolve itself again into the former question, Whether there can possibly be a personal distinction in the unity of the Divine Nature? The words in which you pretend to discover a contradiction, imply no such thing: if it were said, indeed, that there are three Gods, and yet but one God, this would be a contradiction: or, when it is said, that there is one God, and three Persons, if the word Person were shewn to be synonymous with the word God, and to signify the same thing; then this, also, would be a contradiction: but as every mortal understands one thing by God, and quite another by Person; so it is a strange way

way of speaking to say, that he contradicts himself, who only affirms, there is one God, and three Persons. But pray, Sir, How are disputes about words to be ended?

*Dech.* By making those, who use them, define their meaning in other words.

*Shep.* And is it not the law of speaking, that every one, with whom we converse or dispute, should understand our words in such a sense as we declare we mean by them?

*Dech.* He hath no right to understand them in any other.

*Shep.* Therefore, Sir, since we expressly declare there is but one God; is it not evident, howsoever imperfectly we express ourselves by the words, on which you charge a contradiction, that we are far from professing a faith in three Gods, by them, or any other words? Upon the whole; it must be owned, there is no contrariety in our meaning, whatever contradiction others may screw our words to.

*Temp.* These words, you are disputing about, are not to be found in the Scripture, but only in the *Athanasian* creed; and therefore I think myself but little concerned to know whether they contain a contradiction, or not. Let those look to it, who confess their faith by that creed; they, no doubt on't, as Mr. *Shepherd* hath observed, are the properest persons to interpret those words, which they make their own, by so often, and so solemnly, repeating them; and it must be confessed, they all assert the unity of the Divine Nature in most express terms. As to the doctrine of the Trinity, I must say this, at least, that it is even more amazing than that of the Incarnation: yet, prodigious and amazing as it is, such is the incomprehensible nature of God, that I believe it will be extremely difficult to prove from thence, that it cannot possibly be true. The point seems to be above the reach of reason, and too wide for the grasp of human understanding. However, I have often observed, that, in thinking of the eternity and immensity of God; of his remaining from eternity to the production of the first creature, without a world to govern, or a single being to manifest his goodness to; of the motives that deter-  
mined



mined him to call his creatures into being; why they operated when they did, and not before; of his raising up intelligent beings, whose wickedness and misery he foresaw; of the state in which his relative attributes, justice, bounty, and mercy, remained, thro' an immense space of duration, before he had produced any creatures to exercise them towards; in thinking, I say, of these unfathomable matters, and of his raising so many myriads of spirits, and such prodigious masses of matter, out of nothing, I am lost and astonished, as much as in the contemplation of the Trinity. There is but a small distance, in the scale of beings, between a mite and me: altho' that which is food to me, is a world to him, we mess, notwithstanding, on the same cheese, breathe the same air, and are generated much in the same manner; yet how incomprehensible must my nature and actions be to him! He can take but a small part of me with his eye at once; and it would be the work of his life to make the tour of my arm; I can eat up his world, immense as it seems to him, at a few meals: he, poor reptile! cannot tell but there may be a thousand distinct beings, or persons, such as mites can conceive, in so great a being as me. By this comparison I find myself vastly capacious and comprehensive, and begin to swell still bigger with pride, and high thoughts; but the moment I lift up my mind to God, between whom and me there is an infinite distance, then I myself become a mite, or something infinitely less; I shrink, almost, into nothing. I can follow him but one or two steps in his lowest and plainest works, till all becomes mystery, and matter of amazement, to me. How, then, shall I comprehend himself? how shall I understand his nature, or account for his actions? In these he plans for a boundless scheme of things, whereas I can see but an inch before me; in that he contains what is infinitely more inconceivable than all the wonders of his creation put together; and I am plunged in astonishment and blindness, when I attempt to stretch my wretched inch of line along the immensity of his nature. Were my body so large, that I could sweep all the fixed stars visible from this world in a clear night, and grasp them in the hollow of my hand; and were my  
soul

soul great and capacious, in proportion to so vast a body ; I should, notwithstanding, be infinitely too narrow-minded to conceive his wisdom, when he forms a fly : and how, then, should I think of conceiving himself ? No ; this is the highest of all impossibilities. His very lowest work checks and represses my vain contemplations, and holds them down at an infinite distance from him. When we think of God in this manner, we can easily conceive it possible, that there may be a Trinity of persons in his nature.

*Dech.* But, surely, if you thought thus of God, you could not imagine a being, so infinitely great, would humble himself, and, taking on him the nature of man, suffer poverty, and persecution, and the punishment of a slave, for the relief of mites and reptiles ; such as we must be, in comparison of him.

*Shep.* O ! Sir, consider him in the immensity of his goodness, as well as of his greatness ; and this will sufficiently account for that wonderful act of condescension. But I observe, the whole difficulty that lies against your receiving the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the Trinity, arises from your measuring God by yourself : you could not stoop to such indignities for the relief of creatures so far beneath you ; you could not suffer so patiently for those who persecute and revile you with such bitterness and contempt, and so maliciously aim at your life ; and therefore you imagine God could not do it : but he is infinitely gracious and good. There is no insect so small, nor even an atom of matter so minute, as not to share in his attention and care. He feeds the young ravens, he watches over the life of a sparrow, he cloathes the lilies ; and as to man, who is a being of much greater importance, he numbers the very hairs of his head ; and therefore must be supposed to care for his immortal soul, with the tenderness of a most affectionate Father. You, Mr. *Dechaine*, are unable to demonstrate the impossibility of more than one person in one human soul ; and yet such do you conceive the unity of God to be, from your imperfect idea of your own unity, that you think it impossible there should be more than one Person in God. You take the personality of a man to consist in his will,

or

or consciousness ; whereas, in this, you are, probably, mistaken. If it consisted in his will, he must become a new Person, should he be endued with a new will, which, for ought you or I know, is possible ; and if he should fall into absolute idiotism, and have no will, he must then be no Person. If his personality consisted in consciousness of ideas, it must suffer a change, as often as he loses any of his former ideas, or acquires new ones ; and he must cease to be the Person he was, whenever he loses all his former ideas, and gathers a new set. Yet, ignorant as you are of your own, or of personality in general, you venture to say there can be no sort of personality in God, whose nature you allow to be utterly incomprehensible.

*Dech.* By your way of talking, we must be totally ignorant, both of ourselves and God.

*Shep.* By no means. We know enough of ourselves, to direct us in our conduct and management of ourselves, altho' there be secrets within us, which it is as impossible for us to comprehend, as it is for a circle to encompass itself ; and I leave it to you, and every rational creature, to consider, whether there may not be secrets and mysteries in the Divine Nature, which the narrow mind of man can no more comprehend or conceive, than the smallest circle can encompass infinite space. But the vanity of man, in respect to his capacity of knowledge, is prodigious. It was a good observation of *Bruyere*, that, howsoever dissatisfied a man may be with his portion of riches, power, or other good things ; yet every man is contented, and well pleased, with the stock of sense and understanding that Providence hath dispensed to him. The truth, however, is, that God hath dealt out knowledge to us with a frugal hand, and given us only so much of it as is necessary to our occasions : when we pry thro' the limits prescribed by our wants and occasions, all beyond is an useless field of speculation, covered with uncertainty and darkness. It is enough for us to know, that bread can nourish us ; but how it does so, we are neither able, nor concerned, to understand. We know that we ourselves are free, rational, and accountable creatures ; but what the internal frame and nature of the  
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human-soul is, from whence freedom and rationality result, it is neither possible, nor useful, for us to know. We know it is God, whom we are to account to for our actions, pursuant to the relation we stand in to him; and we know he is an infinitely gracious Maker, an infinitely wise, just, and powerful Governor and Judge, our Father, our Redeemer, and our Comforter; made known to us in these three different respects, by a distinct and personal interference with us: so far it is necessary for us to know him. But if we once attempt to advance this practical into a speculative knowledge of him, and to inquire, for example, how it is that his mercy and justice can be both infinite, or how the unity of his nature consists with its personal distinction, we become guilty of the highest folly and presumption.

*Dech.* But if such points are purely speculative, and above our comprehension, according to your own doctrine; there can be no need of revealing them to us.

*Temp.* I was just going to observe that to Mr. *Shepherd.*

*Shep.* To believe that God is infinitely merciful, and infinitely just, and that in him there are three Divine Persons, are most useful and practical points: but to account for the consistency of those infinite attributes, and of the Divine unity and personality, is mere matter of impossible speculation, and bold presumption.

*Temp.* But you have not yet shewn, that a belief in the Trinity is necessary to the Christian scheme.

*Gunn.* No; he hath neither proved that, nor shewn that there is any such doctrine set forth in Holy Scripture.

*Shep.* To any ordinary reader of the Scriptures the doctrine of the Trinity appears evidently to be the very foundation and essence of our whole religion; and both to comprehend, and give sense and weight to, all the other Christian doctrines. If God hath not an eternal Son and Spirit, the whole mystical scheme of our redemption by his Son, and of our sanctification by his Spirit, which takes in all the Gospel, either immediately, or by necessary consequence, and settles the distinction between it and all other religions, comes to nothing. We



read, every-where throughout the New Testament, of Christ's dying to take away the displeasure of his Father against sinners, of his being sent by his Father to instruct and reform the world; and all his doctrines, together with those of his Apostles, whether relating to faith or practice, derive their authority from the truth and reality of his mission. We read every-where of the Holy Ghost's inspiring, comforting, and sanctifying the church of Christ; and are told, on all occasions, that the grace and assistance, imparted by him, are absolutely necessary to a Christian life: we likewise see, in numberless passages, that Christ and the Holy Ghost are personally distinguished from each other, and from the Father; and that the name and attributes of God are expressly ascribed to both. The merit and value of the grand Sacrifice offered by Christ arises from the dignity and Divinity of his Person; and the authority of the Holy Scriptures, depending on our belief that they are the word of God, makes it necessary, also, to believe that the Holy Ghost, who dictated them to us, is God. Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, don't you think the doctrine of the Trinity is plainly set forth in the New Testament?

*Dech.* If I had not thought so, it would have been very idle in me to have objected that doctrine to you as a Christian.

*Cunn.* Be so good, Mr. *Shepherd*, as to favour us with a few of those texts, in which you conceive the doctrine of the Trinity to be set forth: you say, I think, that it is expressly declared in Scripture.

*Shep.* I do not say, that the word *Trinity* is to be found in Scripture; but I can easily shew, that the doctrine, intimated by that word, is expressly and copiously delivered to us in the New Testament.

*Temp.* That will be sufficient.

*Shep.* I believe I need not cite any passages to prove the distinction between Christ and the Holy Ghost, nor between both and the Father.

*Cunn.* We will allow that distinction to be as great as you please; but prove the Divinity of Christ and the Holy Ghost, and their unity in the same nature and essence with the Father.

*Shep.* In the first of St. *John's* Gospel, wrote to refute the *Cerinthians*, who denied the Divinity of Christ, the Word is expressly called God; and the same Word appears, soon after, to be no other than Christ, where it is said, that *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*

*Cunn.* God, in that place, is to be taken in the same sense as when the Angels or Kings are called Gods. You know it is said, *There be Gods many*; or, as Dr. *Clarke* ingeniously interprets it, in a derivative sense, altho' intimating in Christ a priority and superiority to all the other creatures of God.

*Shep.* You will allow, that when it is said, *the Word was with God*; God there, at least, must be the true and only God.

*Cunn.* I will.

*Shep.* We may be sure, then, *John* would not, in the very same verse, change the sense of the word God, without any warning given of such a change. He could not, if he did, but be sensible his manner of speaking tended to lead his readers into a belief of Christ's Divinity; and would never have expressed himself in so unguarded a manner as this, had he believed our Saviour to be a mere creature. But you can give no reason why the word God is to be understood in the proper sense first, and again, immediately after, in an improper and inferior sense. In the 26th chapter of St. *Matthew's* Gospel, the *Jews* ask our Saviour whether he be the Christ, the Son of God; and in the 10th chapter of St. *John's* Gospel, when Christ says he is the Son of God, they take up stones to stone him, and say, *Thou, being a man, makest thyself God.* This, I think, shews, that the *Jews* commonly expected the Son of God for their Christ, or *Messiah*; and that they understood our Saviour as taking on him the stile of God, by saying, he was the Son of God, and that he and his Father were one.

*Cunn.* But if Christ knew himself to be God, why did he not expressly assert his Divinity, on this occasion?

*Shep.* He did, in saying, that he and his Father were one; and in saying, he was the Son of God, which he knew the *Jews* understood in the same sense as if he had said, he was God. In another passage of the same Go-

spel, our Saviour, discoursing with the *Jews*, takes to himself the incommunicable name of God; *Before Abraham was, I am*: for which they again take up stones to cast at him.

*Cunn.* That is, before *Abraham* was, it was decreed, that Christ should come. Christ, by a parity of expression, is called, in the *Revelations*, the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*.

*Shep.* If you should so construe a sentence of *Horace* in any school, you would go fair to suffer for it. Christ had said before, that *Abraham rejoiced to see his day*; and, upon the *Jews* expressing great surprize at this, he tells them, *Before Abraham was, I am*. Upon this, the *Jews*, filled with indignation at his taking upon him the stile and name by which the Supreme God was, with greatest dignity, distinguished, attempt to stone him; and he leaves them in the full opinion of his having assumed the aforesaid title. *St. Thomas*, towards the end of this Gospel, after having doubted the testimony of his eyes, as to the reality of our Saviour's resurrection, and tried it by his feeling; breaks out into a strong confession of his conviction: *My Lord, and my God!*

*Cunn.* That is only an exclamation. *O my Lord*, was applied to his Master; and *O my God*, to the Supreme Being.

*Shep.* Now a plain reader would be apt to think they were both applied to Christ. I am sure, if such a method of interpretation is admitted, any thing, or nothing, may be proved from Scripture. But that *St. Thomas* did in these very words confess his faith and conviction, and speak to Christ only, is evident, because those words are introduced with these of the Sacred Historian; *And Thomas answered and said unto him*, that is, Christ, *My Lord and my God*; and Christ understanding them as a confession of his faith, saith unto him, *Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed*. In the ninth chapter of his Epistle to the *Romans*, *St. Paul*, speaking of the *Israelites*, says, *that it was of them as concerning the flesh, that Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever*.

*Cunn.* The latter words should be thus translated, *God be*

*be blessed for ever*; and *Grotius* seems to favour this sense on account of the word *Amen* subjoined.

*Shep.* But ours is a literal translation of the *Greek* words, *ὁ ὢν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ ἄρρητα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν.* Here is no shadow of an ejaculation, nor the least word, or termination of a word, to favour the putting in of, *be*, before, *God*. As to the word, *Amen*, it gives no sort of colour to your forced interpretation. It is used on other occasions, as well as at the end of a prayer or ejaculation, and is, in its general sense, a confirming particle, signifying *Verily*, or *Indeed*. You know, that whenever our Saviour says, *Verily, verily*, the original words are, *Amen, amen*. But altho' I will freely grant you, that *ἀμήν* contains in itself a prayer, as used in this passage of *St. Paul*, and in the first chapter of his Epistle to the *Romans*, where he says, *The Pagans worshiped the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen*; yet neither passage can itself be a prayer; for in both, the Apostle only says, that *God*, and *Christ Jesus*, whom he expressly calls *God*, *are blessed for ever*; and then says, *Amen*, that is, *So may it be*. The text of *St. Paul*, in his first Epistle to *Timothy*, already cited in our discourse about the Incarnation, contains an express proof of our Saviour's Divinity: *Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, &c.* In the same Epistle, *Christ* is called, the *Lord of Lords*, and *King of Kings*; and in the 17th of the *Apocalypse* he hath the very same titles ascribed to him. The incommunicable attributes of *God* are given in Scripture to *Christ*. In the first of the *Apocalypse* he is called the *Almighty*. In the same chapter he is set forth as eternal, and called the *Alpha and Omega*. In the sixteenth of *St. John's Gospel* he is said to be omniscient: *Now are we sure, that thou knowest all things.* In the third chapter of the same he speaks of himself to *Nicodemus*, as omnipresent: *No man hath ascended up into Heaven, but he that came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man, which is in Heaven.* *St. Paul*, in his first and thirteenth chapters of his Epistle to the *Hebrews*, ascribes immutability to him, in the very words addressed by the Psalmist to Almighty *God*, and, we may be sure,



in the same sense and extent; *Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.* St. John, in the latter end of his first Epistle, speaking of Jesus Christ, says, *This is the true God, and eternal Life.*

Cunn. This giving the attributes of God to Jesus Christ, is only to be understood in a derivative sense; and is oftener to be interpreted of the religion of Christ, than of his person, as Dr. Clarke, and many others, have observed.

Shep. Were the Apostles capable of such loose expressions in relation to a matter of the greatest consequence? Surely no Christian can suppose it of any ordinary Divine. If, however, we can attribute a conduct so careless, or rather disingenuous, to the Apostles, shall we charge the same on God's Spirit, who guided the pens of the Apostles? It would be endless to cite all the texts of Scripture, in which the Divinity of Christ is expressly, or by necessary consequence, asserted; and therefore I pass to those in which the Divinity of the Holy Ghost is set forth to us. Those actions that are said in Scripture to be done by God, are also said to be done by the Holy Ghost; and they are such as none but a Divine power could perform. We are told in the first of the *Acts*, that the Holy Ghost spoke the prophecy concerning Judas by the mouth of David, whose inspirations, as well as those of all the other Prophets, were from God, who alone is able to instruct in that manner. Again, he is proved to be God, by knowing what none but God could know: *The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*

Cunn. Nothing more may be implied in those words, than he is admitted to higher knowledge of Divine things, than men are; which will by no means prove him to be God.

Shep. But he does not know them, as one informed of them, but by consciousness, as the spirit of man knows the things of a man; and, consequently, he must partake of the Divine nature, as much as the soul of a man does of the human. St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, says, *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* That is a temple,

temple, which the Deity, to whom it is dedicated, inhabits. If the Spirit of God be not God, how can we be said to be the temples of God, since it is the Spirit only that dwelleth in us? Nothing but the supposed presence of a Deity can make a temple. If the Holy Ghost were a creature, the sin against him could not be unpardonable. We, as creatures, are commanded by our Creator to forgive one another our trespasses, and to pray to God to ratify that forgiveness; whereas we are even forbidden to solicit pardon for sins against the Holy Ghost.

*Cunn.* It was the extreme malignity of the sin itself, and not its being committed against the Holy Ghost, that rendered it unpardonable; for, had the dignity of his person made the sin unpardonable, a sin against our Saviour must have been unpardonable too, the dignity of his person being, on your own principles, equal.

*Shep.* This very sin of ascribing our Saviour's miracles to the Devil, was committed against our Saviour, and in derogation of his character; yet it became unpardonable, not because it was committed against Christ, but against the Holy Ghost, that is, because those who were guilty of it, sinned against the highest cause of conviction afforded them by the Spirit of God, and called that Spirit a Devil. He is also clearly proved to be God, from his office of governing the Church, which consists in guiding us into all truth, in communicating all sorts of religious gifts and graces, in strengthening us against all manner of temptations, in purifying our souls, &c. Now he that can do these things, must be able to search the heart, and know all our wants; he must be omniscient, or it is impossible he should know how to execute such an office; he must be omnipresent, or he could never communicate universal assistance in all places and emergencies; he must be omnipotent, or it will be impossible for him to sway the stubborn heart of a man, nay, of all men, and to provide for the infinite exigencies of his Church, with such spiritual aids, as no created power can supply. Now we are told in Scripture, this office belongs to him; and we cannot think he wants any of the Divine perfections necessary to it. The miraculous conception of

the Son of God, his power to cast out Devils, his resurrection from the dead, are all ascribed to the operations of the Holy Spirit. It was he who inspired the Apostles with the wonderful gift of tongues, by which they were suddenly enabled to speak all sorts of languages, of which they had never learnt a single word; an effect of Divine power, the most amazing that can be imagined! Lastly, the Apostle St. Peter calls the prevarication of *Ananias* a lying to God, which but a moment before he had called a lying to the Holy Ghost. Surely, if St. Peter had not believed the Holy Ghost to be God, he could not have been capable of using such an expression, as must inevitably either have led his hearers into idolatry, or filled them with abhorrence of him, and his doctrine.

*Cunn.* 'Ananias, by lying to the Apostles, in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt, did in effect lye to the Holy Spirit; and lying to the Holy Spirit was the very same thing as lying to God himself, who dwelt in the Apostles by his Holy Spirit. The like manner of speaking is frequent in Scripture, 1 Sam. viii. 7. *They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me (a).*'

*Shep.* This very quotation serves my purpose extremely well; for if those, who rejected the prophet, speaking in the name of God, rejected God himself, they who lyed to the Apostles, in whom the Spirit of God dwelt, lyed to God, because that Spirit is God; they lyed not to the Apostles, but to God, who was in the Apostles, and gave them the words they uttered, and the authority, by which they acted. For my part, were I capable of putting either an *Arian* or *Socinian* interpretation on these words of St. Peter, I should give him up as an impostor, and could never believe he spoke the dictates of that Spirit, about whom we are disputing. But this remark may be justly extended thro' almost the whole New Testament, because the Divinity of our Saviour, and the Holy Ghost, are every-where set forth in such lights and expressions, as make it impossible for us to think otherwise of its authors, than as the vilest impostors that ever lived, if they did not believe each of them to be God. Idolatry is stigmatized both in the Old and New Testament, as  
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(a) See Dr. Clarke's scriptural doctrine of the Trinity on this text.

the most abominable and damnable sort of sin ; and there is the utmost care shewn on all occasions to prevent the world from falling into it. But how inconsistent with that care are the passages I have been citing, if their authors did not believe in the Trinity ! Indeed, Mr. *Cunningham*, we must either believe in the Divinity of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, or wholly lay aside our Bibles.

*Cunn.* You know, Sir, I only object for argumentation's sake.

*Temp.* Ah, Mr. *Cunningham* ! was that all ? — But pray, Mr. *Shepherd*, proceed, and give us a few of those passages, in which the unity of the three Divine Persons is most clearly revealed to us.

*Shep.* The unity of the Son with the Father appears from the tenth of St. *John's* Gospel, where Christ says, *I and my Father are one* ; and from the fourteenth of the same, where he tells *Philip*, who had desired him to shew him the Father, *He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me ?*

*Cunn.* These expressions relate not to a sameness of nature, but to an union made by consent and charity ; for Christ, praying to the Father, saith, *Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are one.* Hence it is plain, that there is no other unity implied by these passages, between the Father and the Son, than among the disciples ; nay, as Christ prays, that the disciples *may be one with the Father and him, as the Father and he are one*, it follows, that there is no other unity between the Father and Son, than that which subsists between them and the faithful.

*Shep.* If *Philip*, in having seen the Son, saw the Father also, as far as it was possible for a mortal to perceive the Divine Nature, there must certainly be an higher union between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity, than there can be made between the Divine and human nature, by mere charity or communion ; for otherwise *Philip's* request was by no means gratified. *Philip* asked not to hear the words, or see the works, or taste the love of the



Father, as Dr. *Clarke* interprets it, but to see the Divinity of the Father; and Christ says he had seen that, in seeing him. The unity of the Holy Ghost with the Father is proved from the tenth chapter of St. *Matthew's* Gospel, where the Holy Ghost is called *the Spirit of the Father*; and his unity with Christ is proved from the fourth of the Epistle to the *Galatians*, where he is called *the Spirit of the Son*. But there are several remarkable places of the New Testament, where the Three Persons are mentioned together, with joint and equal marks of authority, as in the latter end of St. *Matthew's* Gospel, where a commission is given to the Eleven to go and baptize all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Here the authority of the Three is but one and the same. The recommendatory blessings at the ends of the Epistles are generally delivered in the name of the Three Persons, as being the joint act of them all. In the first Epistle of St. *John* it is said, that *There are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and that these Three are One*. It is observable, that the Greek word τὸ ἐν, which we translate here, and in the passage just now quoted from the tenth of St. *John's* Gospel, by *one*, is put in the neuter gender, so that it ought to be rendered, *one thing or being*.

*Cunn.* The text last quoted from the first Epistle of St. *John*, which, were it Scripture, would come pretty home to your purpose, is, I think, with good reason, esteemed spurious. It is not found in many antient manuscripts. Dr. *Burnet*, if I remember, says in his travels, that it is neither to be found in the *Vatican Manuscript*, nor in that which is at St. *James's*; and *Mills* agrees, that it is not quoted by any of the Greek Fathers before, or in the time of the *Nicene* council, confessing, that the epistle ascribed to *Athanasius*, in which it is found, is spurious.

*Shep.* It is certainly wanting in some old manuscripts; but it is found in many others; and what proves it genuine, beyond all contest, is, that *Tertullian*, St. *Cyprian*, and *Fulgentius*, cite it in their writings, the two former before the rise of the *Arian* controversy (a). As to its being left out in some antient manuscripts, *Socrates* the historian

(a) Vide Millium in Locum.

historian assigns the reason. He says, *The Christian Church had been perpetually complaining, that this epistle of St. John had been corrupted by the first opposers of our Saviour's Divinity.* We are not to be much surprised to find this text wanting in the *Greek* copies, rather than in the *Latin*, because the opposition given to the doctrine of the Trinity began, and reigned chiefly, in the *Greek* Churches; so that a corruption of this nature was more likely to take place among the *Greeks* than *Latins*. Be this as it will, I must observe to you, that *Mills*, who is far enough from shewing a partiality for the text, insists, and that upon strong reasons, which it would be too tedious to recite here, on the genuineness thereof.

*Temp.* And pray, Mr. *Cunningham*, will you let the doctrine of the Trinity pass upon us after all?

*Cunn.* After all what? How am I concerned?

*Temp.* O, it is very true; you are a Parson. Let me try a little to recollect the substance of what I have heard concerning this doctrine. It seems, at first sight, to be highly repugnant to reason; but, upon considering the matter more closely, it appears, that we cannot possibly, by the light of reason and nature, know enough of God, either to prove there is a distinction in the Divine Being, analogous to that of persons among men, or to demonstrate there is not. The proof is equally impossible on both sides; for we can prove no farther than we know, in any matter. The instances usually given of a triangle, of a trine dimension in matter, of three faculties in the human soul, of a threefold piece of cloth, serve well enough to remove the difficulties objected to the doctrine of the Trinity, so far as they affect the possibility of a personal distinction, since God and person signify quite different ideas. The unity of God is no more destroyed in my mind by the supposition of three persons in God, than the unity of a piece of cloth after it is folded. So far I think we can hardly say, with sense and truth, that there is a mystery in the doctrine. But when we affirm, that each Person is not only a Divine Being, but whole and intire God, apart from the other Persons, we then express a mystery, which no instances can reach.

*Dech.* Nor no mind or imagination understand.

*Temp.* I profess I understand it perfectly well, or I could not so easily distinguish it from the former point of doctrine that comes near it. Nay, I am confident you too must understand it; for how otherwise could you object a contradiction to it? We never say a proposition is true or false, consistent or contradictory, till we understand it. That which no mortal is able to understand in this proposition, is *how* the Deity should be *whole* and *intire* in each Person. This cannot be understood, and therefore can never be explained; but I think it may be believed, because it cannot be proved either impossible or contradictory, till we perfectly know the nature of God, and can conceive of unity, of identity, and of personality, not by analogy only, but as they are in their own proper nature, in their own immediate sense, applied to God. I see plainly there is nothing in the world that deserves the name of a true religion, but the Christian; and I see as plainly, that the Christian religion is wholly insufficient, and the Scriptures wholly fallacious, if Jesus Christ is not God, and if the Holy Ghost is not God: yet, Mr. *Shepherd*, I must confess, the doctrine of the Trinity oppresses my mind, when I endeavour to pursue it into the several articles, in which it is set forth by the *Athanasian* creed.

*Dech.* The plain expressions, and necessary implications, of Scripture are just as bad.

*Temp.* As far as I can see, they amount to much the same thing; but the points, in which I am lost, are so far above my comprehension, and yet so necessarily connected with other points, the truth of which is not to be doubted, that I must either say, that is contradictory, which may possibly be otherwise; or say, that is false, which I cannot help believing to be true. Since, then, reason, and the light of nature, can offer nothing conclusive either for, or against, this doctrine, those who believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, must receive it; and such as look upon those writings to be the productions and forgeries of men, may reject it. Thus the controversy resolves itself into that concerning the truth and Divine authority of the Scriptures, which hath been sufficiently inquired into already.

*Shep.* Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, does God foreknow the actions of men?

*Dech.* He does.

*Shep.* Is his foreknowledge certain, or may he be mistaken in respect to our actions?

*Dech.* It is certain, and he cannot therein be mistaken.

*Shep.* Are we free as to our actions?

*Dech.* Yes, or we could not be moral and accountable.

*Shep.* It follows, then, that I may do or not do, that which God certainly foresees I will do. This seems to be a contradiction.

*Dech.* But there may be a faculty in God, and there certainly is, by which he foresees contingencies, and the actions of free beings, without causing those actions.

*Shep.* Have you any idea of that faculty?

*Dech.* None. It is inconceivable to me.

*Shep.* This, then, in respect to you, is an incomprehensible mystery. You said just now, that freedom of action is necessary to morality. Pray do you mean, by moral freedom, the power of doing good or evil, whichever we please?

*Dech.* I do.

*Shep.* Does not virtue and goodness then consist in doing good, when we might do evil?

*Dech.* It does.

*Shep.* And does not vice and wickedness consist in doing evil, when we might do good, or avoid doing evil?

*Dech.* It certainly does.

*Shep.* You believe, if I mistake not, that God acts by the eternal law of nature and reason.

*Dech.* I do.

*Shep.* Can he transgress that law, and do evil?

*Dech.* No, that would be a contradiction to his own nature.

*Shep.* It follows, then, that God is not morally free.

*Dech.* This would be a shocking conclusion. But the goodness of God's nature is such, that altho' he cannot do that which is evil, nor abstain from doing that which is good, yet he is perfectly free.

*Shep.*



*Shep.* This also seems to be a flat contradiction. To say, that the infinite goodness of his nature makes it utterly impossible for God to do evil, is the same exactly as to say, he is under a natural necessity not to do evil. And to say he is morally free, is to say he may do evil. Now the necessity and freedom in this case being both moral, the contradiction is flat and plain, and amounts to this, that God, in respect to good and evil actions, is both a necessary and a free agent. *Dr. Clarke*, in his treatise on the attributes, labours to get clear of this contradiction upon your principles, but without success; and leaves it just where you, and all men, who hold the same principles, must be forced to leave it. To assert, *that God cannot do evil, and yet is morally free (a)*, is to common sense a contradiction.

*Temp.* Yes, even in terms.

*Dech.* I own I can't tell how to account for it.

*Shep.* Own therefore, that you hold such mysteries in respect to the Deity as are even harder to be conceived, and properly expressed or explained, than the doctrine of the Trinity. I could draw more instances of this kind from your notions of God; but these are sufficient for the present purpose, and plainly prove to us, that natural religion abounds with fundamental mysteries, which carry with them a stronger appearance of inconsistency, than that urged against the doctrine of the Trinity. When we talk of God, who is infinite and incomprehensible, it is natural to run into notions and terms, which it is impossible for us to reconcile. But in lower matters, that are more within our knowledge and comprehension, you, who are such an enemy to mysteries, and seeming contradictions, will be able to keep yourself clear of them. To say, that a curve line, setting out from a point within an hair's-breadth of a right line, shall run towards that right line as swift as thought, and yet never be able to touch it, seems contradictory to common sense; and, were it not clearly demonstrated in the conchoide of *Neckomedes*, could never be believed. Pray is not matter infinitely divisible?

*Dech.* It is.

*Shep.* That is, it may be divided without end.

*Dech.*

(a) See *Clarke* on the Attributes, 1st edition.

*Dech.* It may.

*Shep.* A cubical inch of gold may be therefore divided into an infinity of parts.

*Dech.* This is easily demonstrated.

*Shep.* And there can be no number greater than that which admits of an eternal increase.

*Dech.* There cannot.

*Shep.* Another cubical inch of gold may be infinitely divided also; may it not?

*Dech.* Yes, certainly.

*Shep.* The parts of both the cubes must be more numerous, than the parts of one only.

*Dech.* So it should seem.

*Shep.* Yet you said just now, that no number could be greater than the infinite number, into which the first cube could be divided. Here, Sir, is a palpable contrariety of ideas, and a flat contradiction of terms.

*Dech.* We are confounded and lost in the consideration of infinities.

*Shep.* It is very true, and surely most of all, in the consideration of that infinite of infinities, in comparison of which all subordinate infinities must be perfectly obvious and intelligible. We justly admire that saying of the philosopher, that *God is a Being whose centre is everywhere, and circumference no-where*, as one of the noblest and most exalted flights of human understanding, and yet not only the terms are absurd and contradictory, but the very ideas that constitute it, when considered attentively, are repugnant to one another. Space and duration are mysterious abysses, in which our thoughts are confounded with demonstrable propositions, to all sense and reason, flatly contradictory to one another. Any two points of time, tho' never so distant, are each of them exactly in the middle of eternity. The remotest points of space, that can be imagined or supposed, are, each of them, precisely in the centre of infinite space. The grand principle of attraction is in itself a mystery; and more so, if considered as the cause of repulsion; for how can matter, considered in itself, act thro' an absolute void, and at a distance, in order to attract or repel, alternately, or upon different bodies at the same time? Nay, its great  
inventor,

inventor, after pursuing it thro' a long chain of experiments and demonstrations, leaves it a religious mystery, and can give no farther account of it, but that *it is the power of God in matter*. The power of the civil magistrate, and the liberty of the subjects to call him to an account, and sit in judgment on his administration, or, in other words, the due extent of civil power and obedience, make a political mystery, which hath never been settled yet, and it is to be feared never will. Mysteries, in short, are admitted in natural, mathematical, and political knowledge, in all the most plain, trite, and common matters. But when we speak of God, who is the most inconceivable and mysterious of all beings, as if he alone were comprehensible, nothing truly is to be admitted, but what may be accounted for to reason. What is reason to God? It is an inch of line to an unfathomable ocean: it is a foot-rule to infinite space. From hence it appears, that the very first principle of all religion, of natural, as well as of revealed religion, is a mystery, nay, the greatest of all mysteries; for it hath God, the most incomprehensible and mysterious of all beings, for its object. And is the very fundamental article of natural religion itself a great mystery, both in respect to the extreme difficulty of finding it out by the mere force of our natural faculties, and to the impossibility, when it is found out, of comprehending the Divine Nature? Now, is it not a little extraordinary, that the advocates for natural religion, which is founded on a mystery, and abounds almost in every article with mysteries, should make it their greatest objection to Christianity, that it is, in some measure, mysterious? Mr. *Dechaine*, I will come to a very fair agreement with you.

*Dech.* What is that?

*Shep.* Tell me how you roll your eye, or move your finger; and if I do not return you a satisfactory account, and a clear demonstration, of the Trinity, I will give it up, and with it the whole system of the Christian religion.

*Temp.* Enough, I think, has been said concerning mysteries; and it does not appear, either that God could not require the belief of them, or that those of the Christian religion are such as could not have had God for their author.

author. It is now time to inquire, whether there is any thing in this religion repugnant to the ends of religion in general, or prejudicial to mankind.

*Dech.* One so easily satisfied as you, may run from point to point, as fast as he pleases. However, I am as willing to be brief on subjects so dry and disagreeable, as your easiness of assent and faith can make you; and the rather, because howsoever plausible a defence the Christian revelation may seem to admit of in one respect, it cannot do so in all; and my arguments for the sufficiency of the natural light prove to me, that revelation is altogether needless, and, consequently, that every pretence to it is an impudent piece of imposture. But is it not time, think you, after so much thought and care for the soul, to provide for the poor body? *Shepherd* himself, tho' rapt in spiritual speculations and mysteries, must at length descend, like one of us, to repair the breaches of his corporeal tabernacle, and gratify the importunities of his outward man.

*Shep.* Yes; but I am thinking how much more convincingly I should argue for religion in the present times, could I subsist without food, and save those who hear me, the expence of a maintenance.

*Dech.* A Parson, and not eat! that would be a most persuasive miracle indeed.

*The End of the Sixth DIALOGUE.*

DIALOGUE





## D I A L O G U E VII.

DECHAINED,  
TEMPLETON,CUNNINGHAM,  
SHEPHERD.

*Dech.* **H**AVING waded thro' the learned puddle of authorities, of manuscripts, translations, commentaries, mysteries, things calculated to confound and puzzle the understanding, we come now to the fair field, and firm ground, of reason, whereon, it is to be hoped, we may tread with more security and pleasure. The Christian religion, when brought to the touch-stone of reason, must appear to be clogged with a gross alloy of ingredients, diametrically repugnant to the ends of religion in general, and highly prejudicial to the virtue and happiness of its professors. In the first place, a religion that tends to divide and embroil the world, to whet and embitter the minds of men against one another, is as little likely to do good, as to come from God. Man cannot live out of society; and such principles as make it almost impossible for him to live in it, must be of the most unhappy nature and tendency. If we believe the scriptural, and other Christian writers, their principles are of the last importance; and if we consult experience, I am sure we shall find they are so imperfectly or obscurely revealed, as to leave the world to numberless diversities of opinion about them. Now their obscurity makes divisions unavoidable, and their supposed importance inflames those divisions to a degree of animosity fatal to the repose and safety of society. In other quarrels we contend about honour, power, riches, and such-like worldly trifles; but, in religious broils, the very souls of men are engaged, God and Heaven are fought for, and the heart of man is raised to the utmost height of fury and rage. Hence debates, that could not be settled by the tongue or pen, come to be disputed with the sword. Fire and fagot are brought

brought in to eke out the arguments on both sides. Those, who fall in the quarrel, are canonized for martyrs by the one party, and damned for heretics by the other. The civil society is sorely shaken, if not totally ruined; and mankind become savages and wild beasts to one another: and for what? Why, for God's sake. I need not be particular, Sir, in pointing out the unhappy times and transactions I hint at. What I have said, is only a short abridgment of your Church-history.

*Shep.* It is but too true. Pray, is the Divinity of our Saviour plainly set forth in the New Testament?

*Dech.* It is: what then?

*Shep.* It cannot be said then, that the obscurity of this revelation occasioned the bickerings between the *Athanasians* and the *Arians* in old times, nor the disputes between us and the *Socinians* in these latter days.

*Dech.* No; but the repugnancy of that revelation to reason did.

*Shep.* I rather think it was man's high conceit of his own reason, than any real repugnancy between reason, truly such, and the revelation mentioned, that raised those frightful commotions we were speaking of. The mere obscurity of the revelation is certainly and confessedly not to be blamed for them. Pray, is the doctrine of a resurrection of the body plainly revealed in Scripture?

*Dech.* I think it is.

*Shep.* It was not, therefore, owing, to any obscurity in this revelation, that *Hymenæus* and *Philetus* in the apostolical times, and the *Quakers* in our own, all professing Christianity, did and do maintain, that the resurrection is to be understood in a mere spiritual sense, and is already past. Is communion in both kinds plainly enjoined in the Scripture?

*Dech.* It seems so.

*Shep.* It is not, therefore, because our Saviour did not plainly command, and his immediate followers constantly practise, communion in both kinds, that a certain Church hath, for many ages, denied the cup to the Laity. Are Water-baptism and the Lord's Supper clearly

clearly commanded in Scripture; and were they constantly observed in the apostolical times?

*Dech.* If we may believe the Scriptures, they were.

*Sh.p.* Yet the *Quakers*, who, if we may believe the *Deists*, are those among us, who come nearest to the primitive *Christians*, can see no such commands in Scripture. And it is their light within that blinds them. It is, indeed, something within, such as false reasoning, passions, prejudices, vanity, and nothing else, that can make men err about the sense of revelations so plain and determinate. As to the importance of certain Christian doctrines, it is not that which animates men to fury and cruelty, but the vainly supposed importance of their own detached opinions about them, and of their own ignorant zeal. Let a doctrine be supposed never so important, that supposition hath no sort of tendency to inspire its professor with hatred to him, who does not receive that doctrine. But, if such a professor shall once take it into his head to believe, that he does God service in persecuting such as deny that doctrine, he will pursue them to death with fire and fagot. The doctrine he may have from Scripture; but his brutal and flaming zeal he draws from a foolish head, and an ill-disposed heart, of his own. There is no one duty so often, and so strongly, inculcated in Scripture, as that of charity. It is said to be greater than faith or hope. Without it the best graces, and the most excellent gifts, are accounted as *sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal*. Those who want it are no Christians, nor is the religion of Jesus to answer for their behaviour. *By this*, says Christ, *shall all men know, that you are my disciples, if you have love one towards another*. And lest a thousand precepts, strongly enforcing charity, forbearance, and forgiveness, even by the hope of mercy from God, should not be sufficient to influence the proud and wrathful minds of men, Christ adds his own example to his precept; he prays and dies for those who spit upon him, and nail him to the cross.

*Dech.* Christianity, without zeal, is a lukewarm affair, and placed by you all on the same footing with Irreligion or Atheism. But a religious zeal never seizes  
on



on the mind, without making the wildest work in the world, and exerting its fiery spirit in cruelty and persecution.

*Shep.* There is a reasonable and useful, as well as a culpable, zeal. They, who persecute others on a religious account, may call themselves Christians; and you, to throw an odium on that name, may honour such monsters with it: yet they are no Christians; they have neither the spirit, nor even the external mark, of Christ's disciples. As you well observe, it is to eke out weak arguments, and support the tottering cause of unsound opinions, that persecution is called in; and it is well worth observing, that those who have adhered the closest to the true principles and genius of our religion, have always shewn least of this persecuting zeal, and suffered most by it. It cannot be shewn, that those who were Christians in any propriety of speech, were ever guilty of persecution at all. But it is most astonishing, to hear the defenders of natural religion accusing the Christian with a spirit of persecution. Christianity hath ever been on the suffering side; and the whole stream of enthusiasm and persecution hath always run directly against it. The abettors of monstrous religions, which they drew forth from their own dark and corrupted minds, employed force and cruelty, such as the world never heard of before, against it at its first appearance; and, since its establishment in the world, the same sort of people have attacked it with all the engines of persecution in their power. They have persecuted it with artifice, ridicule, subtle arguments, and false aspersions. Other religions, tho' big with absurdity and wickedness, found an easy passage into the world; but the Christian hath always had the stream of mens corrupt affections, of their superstitious prejudices, of their policy, power, and malice, to struggle with. The ill-disposed part of the world, which is, by far, the greater part, could never bear the purity and strictness of its principles: they saw no promises, no heaven in it, at least for them; but dreadful denunciations, and intolerable terrors. Their deeds were evil, as well as their dispositions; and they could not bear its light. There was, certainly, somewhat

somewhat more than common in the frightful reception and treatment it met with. I cannot help thinking there was more than human malice at the bottom of it, and more than human power to support its professors against such an astonishing opposition; but I do not think there can be a greater outrage upon modesty, and common sense, than the charge brought against it, for infusing a persecuting spirit, by those who, if we may judge by the virulence with which they rail at it now, would have struck at it with keener weapons than their tongues, had they lived in the earlier times, and been but half as powerful as they are maliciously disposed. Among all their tender lamentations over those who have suffered, which hath seldom happened, for wrong opinions in religion, we hear none for the primitive martyrs. It was cruel to put poor *Vaninus* to death, because he could not believe in God; but we never hear those *Jews* or *Romans* condemned by our modern Deists, who, in more than ten sanguinary persecutions, massacred and burnt so many thousands of inoffensive people, merely for being good themselves, and labouring to make others good. To hear the cry of persecution set up by Deists against Christianity, one would imagine Christ had murdered the whole Sanhedrim, and *Pontius Pilate*; that his Apostles had massacred all the rest of the *Jews*; and that the primitive Christians had torn the poor *Romans* to pieces at horse-tails, boiled the flesh off their soldiers bones in caldrons of hot oil, and roasted their Emperors alive on red-hot gridirons.

*Dech.* This is all but cant and harangue. A religion, about which people cannot agree, must be of little service to the world. If I were going now to choose out one, from an hundred different species of Christianity, how should I be determined? I want to go to heaven the nearest and safest way, quoth I; who will be my guide? I will, says the *English* Priest. No one knows the way so well as I. Have a care, says the *Papist*! If you go with him, he will lead you to the Devil. Follow me; and, tho' you shut your eyes, I will lead you a short and safe cut: we shall be there presently. Hold! says the *Scotch* Priest: if you go with that fellow, he will

will lead you strait to the whore of *Babylon*, and pick your pockets by the way. Friend, step with me, saith the *Quaker*, and thee shalt enjoy the light of a lamp I have within. Pshaw! there is no need of burning daylight, says the *Socinian*: that fellow, however, attempting to snuff the candle of Christianity, hath put it out, and is as dark within as a dungeon; but I have the *new light*, a secret that makes the way to heaven as broad, and as smooth, as a turnpike. Do not roar so loud, Gentlemen. I cannot, I perceive, go with you all; I like that *Englishman* the best: your name is *Shepherd*, Sir, I think. Will you be so good as to take me with you? I will just slip you into the right road, says *Shepherd*, and return to settle some affairs: besides, I am invited to a Christening, and do not care to balk either my belly, or my company. Have you any money about you? Yes. Well, you must pay me for my directions: I live by shewing the right road to strangers. But, Sir, won't you go along? The place I am travelling to is a fine place, and as well worth your seeing, as mine. He who tells me the way to the new *Jerusalem*, and bids me first turn to my right hand, then to my left, and afterwards hold strait forward, is nothing near so helpful to me, as he who goes along; for I may want company, or mistake directions. Every guide should go before; and, if I hire one, I shall take it very ill, if he be running to Christenings and merry-meetings, or turning off into by-ways, and committing me to a parcel of directions (a).

*Shep.* Come, since you have invested me with the character of your guide, I will take my own part of the conversation upon myself. If, in travelling thro' a strange country, you can get no guide to go with you, what will you do then?

*Dech.* I will, at least, endeavour to get a route from some inhabitant, and the best directions I can.

*Shep.* You will not turn back, then, because you can get no one to guide you?

*Dech.* That is according to the importance of the business I go about. Perhaps I may know the road very well

(a) See *Lucian's Hermotimus*.

well myself. If I think I do not, and must go forward, I have nothing to depend on, but directions.

*Shep.* It is very true; and you know there may be people met with, who really know the road very well, and can direct another, tho' they may not be disposed to go that way themselves.

*Dech.* But, I am sure, they cannot describe a road to me, they have never travelled.

*Shep.* Don't be too positive about that. They may have good maps of the country, and exact surveys of the roads; and, besides, may have travelled a part of the way, and returned; and might be willing enough to go along with you, were they not sick, lame, or ill provided for a journey.

*Dech.* Ay, or blind, you might say; and, in that case, I had better want their company. But, even after I have put myself into the hands of an *English* guide, purely because he is my countryman; and we come to a place where the road divides, on the one hand, into a broad and smooth way, on the other, into a narrow and craggy; and I see crouds of good *English* guides, taking down the broad way, with abundance of well-bred company; and my own, after having recommended the narrow way to me, in which I see not a single fellow-traveller, beginning himself to strike off into the broad way, while others are beating out paths of their own in the fields, and every one crying out, Come along with me; what shall I do, in this case, if I cannot safely choose for myself?

*Shep.* If you can neither turn back, nor stay where you are, you must consider which of the roads points towards the place you would go to; in case you have any notion of its bearing, that will greatly help you to determine. But even tho' you have not, if any of the guides should lead you through a little copse, to the top of an eminence, and from thence shew you the place you are travelling to, and a road continued on from the spot you are in, to that very place; this, surely, will relieve you from your distress. Your own natural stature is, perhaps, too low to give you the prospect of an extended country, which may be easily seen from a



rising ground; or, if a wood should stand in your way, and obstruct your view, you must pass it, in order to see freely before you. As to the broad road, though it should seem never so smooth and direct, and be crouded with travellers of the first rank, with coaches, equipages, and all sorts of conveniences and refreshments; nay, tho' you should see the guides all tripping it in the same road, and even your own shuffling off among the rest; yet, if it appears plainly to lead quite away from the place you would be at, you may be sure it is not for your purpose. As to the by-paths, they are the ways which singular and conceited people choose for themselves, have no fences nor boundaries on the right or left; and you may plainly perceive they terminate either in nothing, or in one of the two greater roads, mostly, indeed, in the broad one. And as to the narrow one, if that appears to lead directly to the place you desire to arrive at, you can follow your own eyes, tho' he that shewed it you is not disposed to go along. Don't say, however, that there are no travellers in it; there are some, who will be your companions; and guides you no longer want, being now able to direct yourself. But if, as the road is in some places rugged and steep, and you but weak, you should want others to help you up, don't grudge to treat them at the inns: but if, instead of this, you should curse every morsel the poor men put in their mouths, should make a jest of them on all occasions, should sometimes even beat them, and tell them you want none of their assistance, and that you have eyes and legs of your own; you cannot blame the men, if they should soon grow tired of so troublesome a companion, and give you up to those eyes and legs in which you have so much confidence. But you are a traveller: one may ask you, I hope, without offence, whether you really design for any certain place. Do you know on what point of the compass it bears? Or are you only going, like a right *English* Gentleman, to take a ramble of curiosity and pleasure, without much caring which way you go? If you have fixed on no point, or place, to terminate your journey in, it will be very hard for you to find a guide. Is it honour, or power,

power, or riches, you are setting out for? If it be any of these, I believe you know, as well as most men, how to be your own guide; but, if you do not, there are thousands ready to take you by the hand. If, however, you would travel towards something not in this life, take no guides, but such as can, in one view, give you an intire prospect of the road. If you doubt whether there is any thing worth travelling for in another life, I need not caution you, I suppose, not to neglect what is present, till you have fully satisfied yourself, by some means or other, whether the things below, or the things above, are the best worth caring for.

*Decb.* I am sorry I happened, unluckily, to put you into this allegorical road; for I see there is no end to it.

*Shep.* Pray, Sir, did not those nations, who were left to the light of nature, differ considerably about religious matters?

*Decb.* Pshaw! *Shepherd*, all nations have been left to the light of nature, in religious matters; and it was superstition and priestcraft that introduced absurdities and differences.

*Shep.* The light of nature must then have been very weak and dim, or it had never suffered such monstrous absurdities, and irreconcilable differences, to take an intire possession of all nations.

*Decb.* Be that as it will, no species of superstition, among the Heathens, ever occasioned such bickerings and barbarities, as Christianity hath done.

*Shep.* Considering how little, either of reason or authority, any way of worship among them could plead in its own behalf, I should not be much surpris'd, if they were very indifferent about their religions: yet I find, they gave instances of bigotry, and superstitious fury, infinitely surpassing those of the worst men that ever called themselves Christians. The *Ombi*, a people of *Egypt*, were zealous worshipers of the crocodile; the *Tentyritæ* abhorred that amphibious god, and had a trick of catching and riding him about, till they made him disgorge the carcases he had swallowed: those two nations entertained a most infernal hatred for each other, on account of this religious difference. They were not satisfied

with putting one another to death in the cruelest manner; they even eat the flesh of their enemies raw, and he that came too late for the feast, licked up the blood of the slain, that had been spilt on the ground. This horrible instance of barbarity happened about *Juvenal's* time, and you may see the description of it, at large, in the fifteenth satire of that poet. *Diodorus Siculus* tells us, in his second book, that the antient Kings of *Egypt*, finding the people inclinable to conspiracies and commotions, assigned each city its particular animals for gods; to the intent that each community, hating the rest for their diversity of worship, might be the less inclined to confederate with them against their Kings: and this, says the historian, took effect; for the inhabitants, in one quarter of the country, were perpetually upbraiding those of another with the impiety of their worship: in after-times they added a great number of vegetable, to their animal, deities. Had you lived in that country, and in those times, high as you carry your notions of the light and religion of nature, you had certainly been a zealous worshiper of a dog, a cat, a clove of garlick, or an onion, and, very probably, a furious persecutor of the rest. You might, possibly, have suffered the dog and cat to snarl and scratch, for their respective divinities; but had you been an *Onionist*, you would not have left so helpless a god to the teeth of an hungry and persecuting boor. But there is no need of multiplying instances to prove, either that man, left to himself, is so destitute of religious light, as to admit of the most foolish and portentous forms of religion; or capable of persecuting those who differ from him about religion, with the most horrid cruelty: the shocking barbarities, exercised by the Pagans on the Christians, furnish us with too pregnant a proof of this. Their light of nature suffered them to worship whores, and adulterers, and cut-throats, and devils; and to massacre those, who came to teach them the knowledge of the only true God, with fire and sword, by thousands. Nor was their cruelty the effect of a sudden and transient fury, or of mere popular rage. The Emperors and people joined and persevered in it, for several ages.

*Temp.* This objection of yours, Mr. *Dechaine*, about divisions and persecutions, is fairly thrown off from Christianity, and turned against your own hypothesis, concerning the sufficiency of the light of nature. The strongest sort of proof is drawn from facts, and the facts are directly against you.

*Shep.* Give me leave to close what I had to say on this subject with observing to you, that there is a great and wonderful agreement among Christians concerning fundamentals; that men are not more unanimous about other matters; and that, as I hinted before, it is not about religion, but about their own vain notions, rooted prejudices, and violent passions, that religious disputants make so great a sputter. I must, also, remind you of what hath been said concerning the vast advantages which the authority of the Holy Scriptures derives from the disputes among Christians.

*Cunn.* You said a great deal on that subject, part of which, indeed, was not amiss; but I must own, Mr. *Shepherd*, I cannot see how divisions, among the adherents of any religion, can be of service to that religion. The author of ours did not think as you do, when he inculcated the precepts you recited a while ago, injoining charity and unanimity in the most pathetic terms.

*Shep.* Religious divisions, Sir, or heresies, are as odious, in the sight of God, as any other species of evil; but out of this evil, great as it is, infinite wisdom knows how to extract some good. *St. Paul* touches on one of the benefits arising from divisions, in his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*. *There must be heresies*, says he, *among you, that they which are approved, may be made manifest*; by which he means, that those who are sound in the faith, may be distinguished from such as have secretly attached themselves to false doctrines, and may shine out, like gold refined from its dross. When such a separation as this is once made public, the contrivers of bad opinions, being forced to lay aside the *mask* of orthodoxy, have no longer an opportunity of insinuating their errors into the minds of well-meaning, but unwary people: besides, if we consider either the nature of revealed religion, or that of man, we shall perceive,



that other great advantages may be drawn from religious differences. As to the first, I have already observed, that the writings, in which it is contained, and handed to distant countries or ages, are better proved to be genuine by vouchers violently incensed against one another from principle and passion, than by such as are unanimous in all things.

*Dech.* If any system of truth appears to be worth the retaining, mankind, for their own sakes, will not suffer that which is good in itself, and useful to them, to be lost; and therefore I cannot see what occasion there could have been for quarrelling about Christianity, in order to preserve it, had it been found necessary, by those who tried it. Besides, unanimity would have given a greater credit to your religion, than divisions could have done; and, therefore, seems a more promising preservative: for that which is placed between two or more contending parties, and bitterly fought for by all, is often torn to pieces, and lost in the scuffle.

*Shep.* Our religion was found to be so well worth retaining, that it would, undoubtedly, have been preserved, had its professors never differed about it. In that case, there had been no room for your present objection, indeed; but then your other, levelled against the genuineness of its records, would not have admitted of so easy, or so demonstrative an answer. As to the nature of man, it is such, so fickle, and fond of novelty, that, generally speaking, he is not apt, unless stirred by some passion, to be long earnest and warm in one thing: from hence, if there were no disputes about religion, might, in time, arise a coldness, and inattention to it. This, again, might produce a great, and, at length, a total ignorance of it. Nothing is so apt to rouse attention, and strike out knowledge, as disputes. The public disputations in our universities afford an experimental proof of this; for in those, altho' there is little else but reputation at stake, the disputants on both sides generally exert their utmost efforts for victory. But, when debates about religious differences are once set on foot, all corners of the question, under consideration, are  
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beat into ; light and truth are either forced out, or better supported, and riveted in the mind ; while, at the same time, other collateral, or dependent truths, that did not before occur, are discovered : for a thorough debate on any question not only exercises the rational faculties, but also carries the mind into new topics of thought and inquiry. We light up a candle, perhaps, only to read by ; but, while it shews us what is contained in the book we apply to it, it likewise brings into view every thing else about us, and enables us to examine what is said in the author before us, by what is advanced, either for or against it, in other writers. Thus it is, that while the enemy of truth labours, thro' the corrupt affections, and perverted reasonings, of men, to cloud or suppress the truths of religion ; God, by the very same means, clears up old truths, strikes out new ones, and keeps the minds of mankind awake to religious knowlege. It was, perhaps, for this purpose, among others, that mysteries were revealed, and some doctrines, which might have been more fully delivered by Divine inspiration, were designedly set forth in such a degree of obscurity, as could not fail to give the ill-disposed an occasion of cavil, and furnish the candid mind with an opportunity of exercise and inquiry. Now this is no more an objection to the goodness of Providence, than his having given us our outward necessities only upon the terms of labour, and continual care. How great is the wisdom of that Being, who hath so constituted human nature, that light must spring from darkness, order from confusion, and truth from prejudice and error !

*Temp.* It is not to be wondered at, that men should differ about religious matters, which naturally lead to metaphysical and abstracted inquiries, when there is so much disputation in arts and sciences, relating to sensible things. What is the next ingredient in Christianity, Mr. *Dechaine*, which, in your opinion, is detrimental to mankind ?

*Dech.* **I** Really think, if there were no other objection to Christianity, than that its rewards tend to make men mercenary, and its punishments to fill them with abject, I won't say chimerical fears, in which two consists the true definition of slavery; this, alone, would be sufficient to weigh it down. In order to be either good, or happy, we must be free: but he can never be morally free, who is hired to good actions by an infinite reward, or deterred from bad ones by an infinite punishment: such allurements and terrors, whensoever they are firmly believed in, impose a moral necessity, and a moral necessity is sufficient to take away moral freedom. Then the Clergy will never suffer either their principles, or their conduct, to be severely inquired into by people with whom they have any credit; so that not only the principles themselves, but the conduct of those who preach them, tend alike to enslave mankind. Pray, *Mr. Shepherd*, is he, who is with-held from stealing, merely by the fear of legal punishment, an honest man?

*Shep.* No.

*Dech.* Is he an honest man, who brings me a sum of money from my correspondent, which he would have run away with, had not that correspondent, or somebody else, promised him twice the sum, in case he returned with my receipt?

*Shep.* He is not.

*Dech.* Does it not plainly follow, then, that he who does good, only in hope of reward, and he who abstains from evil, merely for fear of punishment, is not virtuous, or honest?

*Shep.* This subject, concerning punishments and rewards, hath, I am sure, been sufficiently debated already; and therefore I think it a little odd to have it brought on the carpet again; which can hardly be done without repeating what was said before.

*Dech.* You entered on this topic for no other end, but to draw conclusions from it against the religion of nature: now I have as good a right to recal it, in order to make an advantage of it against revelation. Besides, Sir, as it is now my turn to attack, and as your religion may

may be very well attacked, thro' the slavish effects of its sanctions; it will be proper to examine, a little, into those sanctions, in that light, which will render the topic almost new to us.

*Shep.* And so it must be, I find, till we are agreed about it, which, in all probability, will never happen. But I must comply. Pray, Sir, when virtuous men do good, have they any reason for doing so? Or do they, in that, act without reason?

*Dech.* They have reason.

*Shep.* Can you assign that reason?

*Dech.* It is the love of virtue, the beauty of moral good, the pleasure inseparably annexed by our nature to the performance of a good action.

*Shep.* In like manner, when virtuous and honest men abstain from ill actions, have they any reason for their abstinence?

*Dech.* No doubt on't; they have the pain and remorse, that always follow the perpetration of a bad action, before their eyes.

*Shep.* Then, it seems, they do not choose to do good, purely because it is good, but for the pleasure that attends it; nor do they abstain from evil, merely because it is evil, but for fear of the pain and remorse that must follow. Thus your doctrine wholly takes away the moral difference between actions, considered in themselves, and renders them perfectly indifferent; and, in direct contradiction to itself, places virtue in self-interest, and places that self-interest intirely in punishments and rewards: for a punishment or reward may as well be natural, as positive; and may as well follow immediately upon the action, as be set at some distance from it. Now, of the two, he who waits some time for his reward, is less mercenary, and he who extends his view to a distant punishment, is less slavish, than one who must have his reward in hand, or be punished on the spot, to make him good and honest; and if his future reward or punishment is much greater than the present motives of the other, he is, in proportion to that excess, a wiser man too. But pray, Sir, what does moral freedom, opposed to moral necessity, consist in?



*Dech.* In the power to do good, or evil.

*Shep.* And what does freedom, opposed to slavery, consist in?

*Dech.* In the power of doing whatsoever may be for the benefit of the doer, and of abstaining from whatsoever may hurt him.

*Shep.* I think you was formerly obliged to claim, as a part of natural religion, these very sanctions, which you now object to: this is another instance, that a point, formerly proved upon you, nay, even granted by you, is still to be proved over again. This is generally the misfortune of all who dispute with Libertines. If freedom, as opposed to slavery, consists in the power of doing whatsoever may be for the benefit of the doer, and abstaining from whatsoever may be hurtful to him, he can never duly exert that power, unless the good, and the evil, are laid before him in their full extent and weight. If, therefore, future rewards and punishments are actually reserved for him, according as he shall acquit himself here; he can have no freedom of choice in that, wherein it most behoves him to choose judiciously, unless those rewards and punishments are timely notified to him, when he first enters on a course of moral actions. Between two things, utterly unknown to us, we can make no choice; and, if they are only imperfectly known, our liberty of choosing must be proportionably imperfect. Further, the rewards and punishments of the Christian religion do not take away moral freedom; for it is plain from experience, that those, who most firmly believe in them, are often guilty of bad actions, nay, and sometimes of high crimes. They are often guilty of omitting that which is good, and doing that which is evil. And it is also manifest, that those sanctions of the Christian law do by no means make slaves of us: for, in the first place, they do not at all compel; and, in the next, they only induce and move us to that which is undeniably for our own good.

*Dech.* But you granted, a while ago, that he who does good merely for hope of reward, and abstains from evil merely for fear of punishment, is not virtuous; and,  
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if he be not virtuous, he can plead no merit, in order to a reward.

*Shep.* It is very true; and our religion teaches us to plead no merit in, nor claim any reward for, our best actions.

*Dech.* Your religion, then, does not tend to make you virtuous.

*Shep.* This is only playing with the name of virtue. Our religion, Sir, tends to make us perform our duty to God, our neighbour, and ourselves; and this is of infinite service, both to us, and the society of which we are members, give it what name you will. Your rational religion founds morality on punishments and rewards; and, if virtue cannot be built on such an interested basis, you must be as far from it as we: but that our moral ties are much stronger than yours, is evident from hence, that we have all the natural motives to moral rectitude, by which your actions are influenced, and eternal rewards and punishments besides, which you are so far from thinking a trifling addition, that you look upon them as too great, and even compulsory. If we may believe *Socrates* and *Plato*, and, what is yet more, our own experience, virtue is partly a science, and partly an habit: as to its principles, it is purely a science; and, as to its practice and progress, it is altogether an habit. Men must first know upon what reason and grounds they are to be virtuous; and this introduces them to a course of good actions, and, at length, to a conquest over their own corruptions; which, by degrees, exalts their natural love of good, and abhorrence of evil: and as it refines their nature to a nearer resemblance of God, so, in proportion, it fills them with the love of him, and, at last, establishes that glorious principle, as the motive and spring of all they do. Thus Christian virtue, which lays its deep foundations on self-interest and fear, rears its head to heaven, and ends in Divine love. This progress, Sir, which, on a former occasion, was sufficiently dwelt on, is natural: even *Shaftesbury*, in his inquiry into virtue, owns, that it cannot be perfect without religion; and I must insist, that, without religion, it cannot be at all; it must both

begin and end in religion : and, I may venture to say, no man was ever really good, who did not set out with his eye on the sanctions of religion, and, holding the judgment-seat of God in view, did not rise from the fear to the love of God, and make a progress in virtue from lower to higher motives of action. Pray consider, Mr. *Dechaine*, that man is very far from being supreme ; that he hath a bounden and subordinate nature ; that he brings up the rear of intelligent beings ; and that, of consequence, he is made for subjection and obedience ; insomuch that he must either have a master, or a tyrant over him. He is not, therefore, under pretence of liberty, to aim at a boundless latitude and licence to do what he will, and fear nothing : if he breaks loose from the commands and ordinances of his true and natural master, he will be far from finding himself at liberty ; passion and appetite will quickly seize the runaway, and compel him to forge grievous chains for himself. If he would not be the vilest, and most abject, of all slaves, he must be the servant and subject of that master, whose service is his only and perfect freedom, his greatest honour. The will of man lies next his actions, and is the immediate spring of all he does. Now it is sometimes influenced by reason, and sometimes by passion : when reason, rightly informed and directed, holds the reins of the will, the man is free ; because reason, truly such, will not only give him a choice of action, but also furnish him with motives to such actions, as are conducive to his real happiness : but, when passion usurps the government of the will, the man is then a slave ; for passion is blind and violent, will take away his moral choice of actions, and force him upon such a conduct as is highly prejudicial to him. Gross errors can pervert reason ; violent temptations can stir up passion to rebellion ; and either reason or passion may misguide the will : but none of these is sufficient to denominate the man a confirmed slave, till reason becomes habitually attached to error, and passion to temptation : then it is, that the will is forced to point the actions directly against the interest of the agent, and the man is an absolute slave. Here the downward progress of vice  
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is somewhat parallel to the rise and ascent of virtue, and habit puts the finishing hand to both. Now, Sir, I can see nothing, but Divine instruction, that is able rightly to inform our reason, and guard it against important errors; and I can see nothing, but the principles and sanctions of the Christian religion, that affords any foundation to human liberty. He is said to be a slave to another, who must always follow him, do what he commands, adopt all his desires and aversions, and undergo any hardship in the service of his master: it is thus that the passions, those internal tyrants, are themselves, in some men, drawn at the tails of sensual objects so strongly, that they cannot resist, let the mischiefs of following be never so great and obvious; and reason, instead of being able to call them back, is herself dragged along also, and obliged to pimp and cater, like a slave, for her own servants. The will, having no ally, and being obliged to execute whatsoever the mind shall dictate, is carried away with the rest, and absolutely enslaved. Now in the natural man there is nothing of force sufficient to set those slaves at liberty.

*Dech.* Yes; the grievous evils, to which this slavish dance after the passions leads the man, will, at length, correct him.

*Shep.* It will be a little too late, if he should chance to die in the service; and it is highly probable he will: but experience is against such hopes of reformation. We perceive that reflection and reason do little else than endeavour to methodize and reduce the manner of pursuing sensual objects to such a system of expedients, as may render that pursuit more safe and successful for the future. Does the debauchee, for instance, quit his bottle, because it threw him into a fever? Or the lewd man his uncleanness, because he hath got a foul distemper? No; he only considers how to gratify himself, for the future, at less expence, and risque to his health. Did *Cæsar* quit his ambitious and oppressive schemes, upon the rough treatment he received at *Dyrrbachium*? Far from it: he only employed all the force of his vast understanding to extricate him out of the present difficulty, and to take his measures better afterwards. *Cæsar* was



was the greatest slave in the *Roman* empire ; for he was compelled, by his ambition, to undergo infinite toils and dangers : for what ? Why, for a dagger, and an untimely death.

*Dech.* But you will allow, that some men, shocked at the miseries of a vicious life, which they have wofully experienced, betake themselves, afterwards, to more regular courses.

*Shep.* Yes, that I shall readily allow ; but must, at the same time, insist, that the number of those reformed, who are mended merely by their vices, is extremely small ; that they are perpetually in danger of forgetting the rod, wherewith vice had chastised them, and relapsing into their old habits of sin ; and that therefore, in order to a safe and constant course of virtue, some principle is required, that can go deeper than the faint remembrance of a few transient sufferings, and tear up their habits by the roots.

*Dech.* All I contend for is, a liberty of thinking for myself, and not to suffer another, who makes a profit and a trade of thinking for me, to impose his thoughts on me.

*Shep.* Till error or vice have enslaved you, your freedom of thought, whatever you may be compelled to speak or do, can never be taken from you. If, by thinking for yourself, you mean thinking for your own pleasure and interest, which seems, in a very low sense, to be the true interpretation of those words, so often canted by Libertines ; you cannot think more effectually to that purpose, than by thinking as a Christian ; because Christianity sets your true pleasure, and greatest interest, before you, and best shews you how to pursue them.

*Dech.* You will grant, however, that, in order to be sincere in my principles, I must think freely for myself ; because, in order to examine fairly, and become rationally and sincerely a *Christian*, a *Mahometan*, or what you please, it is necessary one should have no byas in favour of this or that modification of religion ; that is, it is necessary one should be a *true Deist*.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* A true Atheist, you mean: for, as *Deism* is a sort or modification of religion, and as that also ought therefore to be fairly examined, without byas or attachment; you ought to have no religion, when you set about such an inquiry. And, as to your sincerity, it is, indeed, a good attendant upon a fair and candid inquiry; but I am sure it is of little advantage to be sincere, in principles hastily espoused, for better for worse, upon the bare recommendation of passion and corruption, and tending to enslave and undo their unhappy abettors. Have you ever been an Atheist, Mr. *Dechaine*?

*Dech.* Never.

*Shep.* Upon your own principles, therefore, it is plain, you have never done justice to Christianity in quitting it, nor to Deism in going over to it, by a fair and unprejudiced examination. How do you know but your former principles of Christianity may have given your mind a byas in favour of Deism, to which, as well as to Christianity, it is a common fundamental to own but one God? Perhaps, had the matter been more candidly considered, you might have found reason for being a Polytheist. How, on the other hand, can you be sure you condemned Christianity on good grounds, since you could not do it till you was a Deist? Or is there not good reason to suspect, you have been too hasty in rejecting Mahometism, since, at no time of your life, you was wholly unattached to some religion, or other, that must have prejudiced you against that of the *Koran*? You could never have fairly weighed any two religions against each other, while you yourself was in one of the scales. Depend on't, you have the whole work to do over again; and, pardon the appearance of a solecism, must prove all religions to be false, before you can prove any one of them to be true. I wonder how this thought, so consequential to your own principles, so near the very scheme you built on, and so necessary to your setting out right, could have escaped a man of your penetration.

*Dech.* I don't know how it is you talk and refine upon things; but I am sure it is plain from experience, that Christian principles, as the *Tragedian* observes, make

make cowards of all who hold them; insomuch that they neither dare act, nor think, as becomes men: if they durst think, they would soon find reason to renounce them; and a little courage in thinking might go a great way to produce liberty of acting.

*Shep.* Yes; Christianity makes cowards of its professors, no doubt on't: witness our martyrs, to whom *Alexander* and *Cæsar* were errant runaways. The same cannot be said of your principles; they make you your own masters, they give you boldness to do any thing, and every principle is as good as a provocative. I am much delighted with your new notion about courage in thinking: a bold heart may put a man upon doing the finest things; but it is necessary to have a stout head, in order to an heroic exploit in thought: such are the heads, I suppose, that produce Atheism; and, when any one stops short at Deism, it is only thro' a pusillanimity of brain. But what if men, growing bold-headed, should begin to butt at your employment, as well as ours? In respect to yours, as it is practised among us, there is, if I mistake not, some occasion for a little courage, in order to free-thinking. Most men, if we may judge by their actions, value their estates and fortunes infinitely more than they do their souls; the law costs them, at least, as much money, and a thousand times more trouble and vexation, than religion. The poor Parsons make a secret of nothing, tell all they know, and invite the world to inquiry and debate about religion; but the law, in which every man is concerned, as well as in religion, and, I am afraid, a good deal more interested, is a mysterious art, which we Laity, in respect to the law, have not courage enough to understand, nor are we allowed to practise it for ourselves, if we did. As to physic, we have had a good many free-thinkers in the way of that useful science, some of whom, as *Montaigne*, &c. believed it to be altogether a cheat; others, upon reading a few books wrote by physicians, and borrowing a few ill-digested scraps of knowledge from thence, and more from the writings of pretenders and empirics, have taken upon them to rail at the whole faculty, to set up for practice themselves, and, for lack of other patients, have tampered with their own constitutions.

I know a most sufficient Gentleman of this stamp, whose hypothesis it was, that taste and nature dictate the most sovereign sort of nostrums for all our bodily disorders. Accordingly, he prescribed to himself, and others, whatsoever they liked best, in all kinds of distempers, and, you may be sure, to most wonderful effect. The science that prescribes to the body, hath its dabblers and opposers, as well as that which prescribes to the soul; but experience and necessity are too strong for them in both cases; and the Physician and Parson are sent for. An empiric, or mountebank, may kill their thousands, and this may bring physic into disrepute with silly and giddy people; but if a *Mead*, or an *Hulse*, should, by the force of skill and medicine, save one patient from misery, or death, it would shew demonstrably, that physic is not a mere imposition; and the mortality that attends the quacks, instead of raising in sensible people a distrust of medicine, shews demonstrably, that those pretenders only kill, because they know nothing of the art of cure.

*Dech.* A fine allusion, truly! and so the Parsons are the only true and genuine physicians for the soul, and all others, who speak or write for the religious information of mankind, are pretenders and quacks.

*Shep.* In my opinion, every one, who hath sufficient ability and piety for the purpose, hath also a right to speak and publish his knowledge, for the good of mankind; but it is not a man's own conceit that can prove him thus qualified. Upon the whole, liberty of thinking is necessary to right reasoning; but when it is pleaded for, only in order to an unbounded licentiousness of action, when we set up for thinking freely for ourselves, in order to act as freely for ourselves, to the great prejudice of others, and even of ourselves, in the end; this is either such a false kind, or such an excess, of liberty, as cannot fail to terminate in real slavery and misery. *Montaigne* shewed what sort of a latitude it is that Libertines would be at, when he said, "I am so enamoured of liberty, that, should I be interdicted the remotest corner of the *Indies*, I should live a little less at my ease." And is it a liberty without bounds, in respect to religion and morality, that man, little, narrow, subordinate man, would



would assume? Is it a liberty to think and do what he lists, that an ignorant, corrupt, and wicked wretch, would pretend to? Yes; the thief would escape from his gaol, and the murderer from his fetters, if he could. And what use would he make of his liberty? Why, he would steal, or cut throats, again.

*Temp.* Human liberty, both of thought and action, certainly hath its bounds, which are a real defence, and by no means a confinement to it: all the laws of man are founded on this supposition, that no man can be free or safe, unless all men are, in some measure, bound, and some men wholly confined; and the laws of God only add higher and stronger boundaries, inasmuch as they bind the consciences, whereas those of civil society only tie up the hands, of men. Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, have you any other objections to the usefulness of the Christian religion?

*Dech.* **H**OW can a religion be useful to those who never had the least opportunity of knowing it? Christianity was not introduced into the world till four thousand years after its creation, and hath not yet extended to the greater part of mankind. They who make it highly useful, nay, even necessary, are not well aware, that, if it were so, a good God could not have denied it to any of his creatures, nor a just God have given it to a few, and refused it to the rest.

*Shep.* In order to prove it inconsistent with the goodness of God to defer the introduction of a necessary religion for four thousand years, and then to extend it only to a part of mankind, it lies upon you, Sir, to prove, that God is, by his goodness, necessarily determined to do all manner of good to all his creatures, at all times; and then to shew, that Christianity, supposing it highly useful or necessary to the whole world, had been more extensively and effectually useful, if it had been delivered to our first parents, and not in a later age. These points have a necessary connexion with that which you have objected to Christianity from the goodness of God; and cannot, I believe, be proved: for, as to the first, the infinite nature of God is free, and limited by no necessities  
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of this, or any other kind; creation and being, with all the good things annexed to them, or made to result from them, are free gifts from God; he could have with-held them; and therefore his goodness is manifested in granting them, and our gratitude due upon receiving them. Were it not so, God would be but an instrument in the hand of necessity; and tho' what he did would be always good in effect, yet it would argue no goodness in the cause, no other goodness in God, than what we see in necessary and inanimate beings, such as the dispensation of light and warmth from the sun, which it cannot with-hold, and which we can return it no thanks for, without gross absurdity and idolatry. We adore the goodness of God, because, when he could have with-held us for ever in the womb of nothing, he freely bestowed a comfortable and happy being on us; and, when he could have destroyed us for ever on account of our defection from him, he mercifully preserved our race, and provided, as well as the nature of things would permit, for our recovery and happiness. Nor does it a whit more reflect on the justice, than the goodness, of God, to have extended the benefits of a necessary religion only to a part of mankind. Your objection itself makes a distinction between the Divine Goodness and Justice, and supposes the former to be the source of all the benefits we receive from God. Now, if it be so, whether we suppose those benefits to be necessarily or freely given; yet still they cannot be the effects of Divine Justice: for if they were, then we should have a right to them; and, consequently, in receiving them, should receive no bounty nor benefit. It is nonsense to say, we can have a right to a free gift.

*Dech.* But the injustice consists in the unequal distribution supposed, which you, who make Christianity so necessary, and yet date its introduction so late, ascribe to God.

*Shep.* This will be of some weight, if it be first proved, that a sinful and rebellious race of creatures have a right to every thing that is necessary to their happiness; and that God cannot, without injustice, refuse the good he does us; that whatsoever good God does to one age or person, he is in justice bound to do to all ages and persons;

sons; that we have all, not only a right, but an equal right, to what is, truly speaking, the mere effect of infinite bounty and compassion; and that the author of Christianity hath made it necessary in such a sense, that nothing else could have sufficed in the place of it at any time; that no part of it could have answered the occasions of men, and been given before his own coming; that the whole of it was absolutely necessary to all mankind; and that all mankind, in all times and places, stood equally in need of it. As all these points are necessarily connected with your objection drawn from the justice of God against the unequal distribution of Christianity, it lies on you, Sir, to prove them, in support of that objection. But I am very confident, neither you, nor any man else, can prove a single one of them.

*Dech.* How inconsistent is all this with the pains you took, the other day, to make me confess the necessity of a true religion!

*Shep.* But that necessity, Sir, arises from our want of the true religion, in order to arrive at the perfection of our nature, and true happiness, not from the attributes of God, as is plain from what hath been already said, and further, from the miserable ignorance of those many populous nations, which, for a long course of ages, have been absolutely, or, at least, almost wholly, destitute of sufficient means to attain to the true religion, whether thro' the prevalence of the old and riveted prejudices, which they had nothing to oppose or conquer; or thro' an extinction of the natural or original light, which, in respect to religion, they had nothing to revive. In most countries no efforts were used to rekindle the one, or dissipate the other; and in *Greece* and *Italy*, where philosophy and human talents did their utmost, altho' helped a little by Eastern traditions, hardly any thing like religious truth was struck out; and the little that was, could not be propagated. All this time, Sir, if you will own, that the knowlege of one only God, and his attributes, is true religion, the *Jews*, being favoured with ample means of that knowlege, were distinguished by Almighty God from all the Gentile world. Besides, even among the Gentiles, one person by the force of stronger talents,  
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and a better education, drew nearer to the truth than another; and a few, than all the rest. These facts, too glaring to be denied, fully refute that equal distribution of religious knowledge, contended for in vain by you, and other Deists; for, had God been obliged in justice to preserve such an equality, no doubt on't, both the talents and instructions given to all mankind must have been exactly equal.

*Deib.* Can God be partial? Hath he favourites, whom he distinguishes by extraordinary marks of his kindness, bestowed on them before they can possibly have any merit?

*Shep.* We may ask an hundred such questions on the other side, which fact will forbid you to answer, as modesty will not suffer me to answer yours. Does the light of natural religion flow thro' the faculty of reason? Is reason equally clear and operative in all men? Are the passions of all men by nature equally manageable? Are the natural tempers of all men equally disposed to virtue? But, admitting that God were either by necessity, or justice, as irresistibly and absolutely determined to our good, as a stone is to descend; yet will it not follow, that he must have conferred the Gospel on the first age of the world, unless it can be sufficiently proved, that in so doing he would have done more good to mankind, than hath been done by sending it four thousand years later. Now, if I mistake not, the contrary to this may be easily made appear. In order to this, let us premise, that the Christian religion had not at all been necessary, or even requisite, had not man fallen from the dignity of his nature into a state of corruption and misery, or rather into a strong disposition to degenerate into such a state; that to recover them out of this state, such means became necessary, as were suited, not only to the nature, but the degree of this corruption; and that it was contrary to the wisdom of God to destroy and create human nature anew, as it was beneath his Majesty to let it stand as it was, and take away sin by a continual and miraculous force put upon it.

*Deib.* Before you go any further, I must enter my caveat against your postulatam about the fall of man; which,



which, after all you said on that subject, I am far enough from being convinced of. I shall not, however, break the thread of our present inquiry, by obliging you to repeat your speculations on a point, from whence, if proved, you will be far enough from drawing any advantage; for if mankind became corrupt and wicked, and Christianity was the only cure for that corruption, it follows, that the remedy ought immediately to have been applied, were it for no other purpose, but to prevent the increase of wickedness. Proceed.

*Shep.* Had Christ been sent, and his religion fully and finally revealed, in the first age of the world, either the memory of the first, and the effect of the last, must have been intirely lost, or so distorted and corrupted in a few ages, that posterity would have been little the better for such a mission or revelation; or else God must have made an infinity of other revelations, in order to ascertain and perpetuate the Christian to future times. Arts, sciences, languages, commerce, must have been all taken out of the natural course of invention and improvement, and all at once revealed; or else it would have been impossible to transmit our religion either to very distant times or countries, with any tolerable degree of purity; or, admitting it had been possible, yet what opinion must posterity have entertained of a religion handed down to them from no-body knew whom, from times, and by means, utterly unknown, which no mortal could account for, as being previous to all memory, all records, and all history? How would our Libertines, so nice and scrupulous about authorities, have liked such a religion as this? It must have been heard upon the same footing of credibility with the wandering Jew, who, in the last age, pretended to have been contemporary with Christ; but those who would believe him, were to depend upon his own word, for which there was not one voucher, either book or man. But God hath dealt more tenderly and candidly by our reason, in giving the full manifestation of our religion at a time, when it could be best examined and propagated.

*Dech.* But if languages grammatically fixed, with arts, sciences, and commerce, were so necessary to the propagation

gation and perpetuity of a revealed religion, and such a religion so necessary to the wants of mankind, why then were not all these helps revealed at the beginning? Why was the world left to a tedious improvement of knowledge, needful for so great a purpose?

*Shep.* Nay, rather, why was not the world destroyed, and a new one made? Why was not man, now corrupted and stained by sin, broken down in a mortar, refined in an alembic, and molded up anew? Why hath not God, by a miraculous interposition of his power, remedied and removed all the evils, moral and natural, of this world? There is no end of such questions. But had God been never so profuse of miracles in respect to arts, sciences, &c. this alone would not have sufficed, because the number of mankind was not, in the infancy of the world, great enough for the purpose. The authority of a few witnesses, in such a case as this, will never answer the end. Besides, as you would not be content with any sort of a tradition, but a written one; and as a prodigious number of artificers are necessary to the finishing one, not to say a sufficient number of books; hands had been wanting, till long after the death of *Abel*, and many others, who, according to your nice notions of God's goodness and justice, must have been deprived of their right to revelation, had that revelation waited for a competent increase of mankind.

*Dech.* I do not perfectly understand you. Might not God have taught *Adam* to write, as well as speak? Might not *Adam* have recorded in writing the perfect revelation, had it been made to him? Might not his sons, after seeing the miracles that ushered in this revelation, have set their hands to the grand certificate or record, containing an account of those miracles, and of the doctrines proved by them? And might not this record have been copied and preserved genuine, as well as the *Jewish* or *Christian* Scriptures?

*Shep.* Had the full revelation of religion been made to *Adam* immediately after he was created, we could have had but one witness to it. Had it been deferred till his sons came to years of discretion, it could have had no more witnesses than he had children; and at the flood  
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the attestation for the genuineness of this record must have been that of eight persons only. But pray consider, Sir, religion could not have been fully revealed, without Christ's appearing in the flesh, and dying for the sins of mankind. Had he appeared in *Adam's* time, who would have put him to death? Or who would have persecuted and murdered his witnesses, that is, *Adam*, and his children? And, if his witnesses had suffered nothing for their attestation, surely you, who cannot believe those witnesses who sealed their testimony with their blood, must have been still farther from giving credit to such as *Adam's* family could have afforded. Thus, Sir, it is plain, that a perfect revelation of our religion could not have been either made or recorded in the beginning of the world. But such a revelation was not then necessary. So much of Christianity, as the world wanted at that time, was actually revealed. God and his will were made known, the Redeemer promised, and sacrifices instituted, to communicate the merits, and keep up the expectation, of the grand sacrifice. This might have been sufficient; but if mankind, in part, lost sight of these revelations, it shews what must have become of Christianity, had it been perfectly revealed in the first age of the world. That such a revelation as I speak of, was made in the earliest ages, is manifest from the traces and foot-steps of it, found to this day in the most barbarous nations. If we may give any credit to history, mankind did not, immediately after their fall, rush into the utmost depravity of manners. They degenerated gradually, and vice in its infancy might have been kept at bay by an imperfect revelation, as easily as afterwards by a full manifestation of religion. All nations have complained of their own wickedness, and, upon comparing their morals with those of former ages, have stiled themselves degenerate.

*Temp.* The mythological notions of a golden, a silver, a brazen, and an iron age, are an evidence of this.

*Shep.* Nay, the gravest historians speak in the same strain; and we ourselves see, that nations do not all at once degenerate from virtue to vice, but corrupt themselves by degrees, as bad principles and customs creep in. It is evident, that the antients were something more than man,

man, I mean as man is now. Their strength and longevity before, and some time after the flood, shew us, that their bodies were sounder and firmer than ours, or; at least, that they lived more temperately than we. The inventions of the antients, their buildings, and performances of wit and genius, afford us no less testimony in favour of their minds. Nature, in youth and maturity, could with a little assistance do that, which now in its old age it cannot perform, without greater strength than its own. Its youth could act with vigour, and support itself with a graceful firmness; but its old age requires the crutch, and the staff.

*Temp.* But, as mankind degenerated, that goodness which moved Almighty God to send his Son, and a perfect religion, at length into the world, must, I should think, have shewn itself in such occasional interpositions and revelations, as the oblivion of primeval revelations, and the increase of wickedness, made expedient.

*Shep.* And accordingly it did. The earlier ages of the world were not so destitute of revelation as some people imagine. There is no sort of reason to think there were any idolaters before the flood. The great age of the *Antediluvians* made it almost impossible for them to lose sight of the true God; for two persons could have handed down the knowledge of God; and his will, from the creation to that great event; when such an example was given of God's displeasure at sin, and such a covenant made with mankind in their common parent, as could not fail of excellent effects for many ages. The *Mesopotamians* and *Canaanites* were, in all probability, the first who corrupted themselves with idolatry; and that not till about the time of *Abraham*, nor then neither, any further than in respect to the use of images, and a trust in subordinate beings, whom they supposed, as the Papists do, to act under the Supreme Being. The *Abimelechs*, Kings of *Gerar*, and *Laban*, tho' an image-worshiper, adored the true God, as appears by their joining in sacrifice with *Abraham* and *Jacob*. The same may be said of the Kings of *Egypt* in those days; for he whom *Abraham* had to deal with, talked familiarly of God, and had even Divine revelations made to him; and yet the *Egyptians* were not



far behind the first idolaters. The antient *Persians* were worshipers of the true God, only under the symbol of fire; and as they used no images, so even in the time of *Xerxes* they destroyed the Heathen temples where-ever they came. Their posterity, the *Persees* in the East, preserve the knowledge and worship of the true God to this day. And, as to *China*, idolatry had got no footing there till two thousand years after the flood. The antient *Italians*, who were a plain and virtuous people, had no temples or images, and probably no idolatry among them, till near the *Roman* times. Even in those countries and ages, wherein idolatry was most prevalent, they believed in one Supreme Being, whom they looked upon as the Creator, and Father, and Ruler of all things in Heaven and in Earth. The history we have of antient idolatry makes it appear to have commenced, some ages after the flood, in the East; then to have infected *Egypt*, and spread from thence, by the means of commerce, into *Greece*, *Italy*, and the Western world. Were we as well acquainted with the antient history of more remote and less corrupted nations, we might possibly find them longer in the enjoyment of the true religion, than those mentioned. But as mankind were gradually losing sight of their antient religious traditions, and adopting idolatrous innovations of their own invention, God left them not wholly destitute of assistance. He raised up prophets and wise men in all the countries, of which we have any history, who laboured to stem the tide of ignorance and corruption. The *Israelitish* family and nation had a continued succession of revelations made to them; and by their commerce and wars with other nations, and their frequent captivities, must have afforded an opportunity of knowing the true God to an infinite number of people. *Canaan* had its *Melchisedek*; the countries beyond the *Euphrates* had their *Balaam*; *Uz*, and the countries adjacent to *Arabia*, had their *Job*; *Nineveh* its *Jonas*; *China* its *Confucius*; *Persia* its *Zoroaster*; and *Greece* its *Socrates*, who laboured to restore the true religion and morality. Other countries had probably other teachers; but we can follow this matter no farther than history leads us. Notwithstanding these helps, idolatry and wickedness

wickedness gained ground, and made the necessity of greater assistances every age more pressing. But the way was to be paved for their approach, and the world disposed to receive them.

*Temp.* I fancy the means made use of in order to this disposition, could they be discovered, would open a very surprising scene.

*Shep.* In order to it, the *Jews*, being instructed by the prophecies of *Abraham*, *Jacob*, *Moses*, *Job*, *David*, *Isaiab*, *Zechariab*, *Micah*, and *Daniel*, began to turn their eyes on the advent of their Great Deliverer; and the expectations they entertained of his arrival they infused by various means into the minds of the Gentiles, among whom they were dispersed by the *Babylonian*, *Grecian*, and *Roman* conquests. It was for this purpose that they were mixed with all the known nations of the East and West, and in process of time had their synagogues in all the great cities, and the writings of their Lawgiver and Prophets translated into the *Greek* language.

*Temp.* You speak of this chosen people, as if God had singled them out from other nations, only in order to convey thro' their captivities, to the rest of the world, some knowledge of the true religion.

*Shep.* If you believe the world to be governed by a Divine Providence, you can no otherwise account for the history of the *Jews*, than upon a supposition, that God distinguished them by revelations on the one hand, and captivities on the other, only to make them subservient to the instruction of other nations. In this light their whole history, from their first descent into *Egypt* to this day, presents us with a scheme of Providence, not only consistent in itself, but extensively conducive to the good of mankind: in any other, it is nothing else than a series of absurdities, of severities inflicted on favourites, or of miracles wrought to preserve a stiff-necked and detestable people. Their prosperity was never at any time of a long continuance, without introducing idolatry: this was usually punished with captivity and dispersion; upon which, as the only means of restoration, they immediately returned to the worship of the true God, and a strict observance of their own customs. These were too

peculiar not to excite the curiosity of their masters; and they too impatient of slavery not to wander into other countries, as often as they could escape from their oppressors, in hope of better treatment. It is probable some of them penetrated as far as *Cbina*, long before the Christian æra; because in that country notices are yet to be found, to which we cannot rationally assign any other original, than some antient acquaintance with the *Jews*. If we may believe the traditions of the *Chinese*, *Confucius*, their great Philosopher, who lived above five hundred years before Christ, had this remarkable saying often in his mouth, *It is in the West that the true Saint is to be found*. And *Laokun*, who lived before *Confucius*, was as remarkable for another saying, which seems to point at the Trinity: *Eternal Reason produced one, one produced two, two produced three, and three produced all things*. They tell us further, that *Mimti*, one of their Emperors, who reigned about sixty years after Christ, sent ambassadors, at the instigation of an apparition, to look for the Saint that Heaven had informed him was in the West.

*Dech.* Pray, Sir, who gives you these accounts from *Cbina*?

*Shep.* The Missionaries, who drew them from the *Chinese* records.

*Dech.* And are they to be credited?

*Shep.* Most certainly; for these accounts could serve no ends of theirs; and they durst never have forged them, for fear of being detected by other *Europeans*, who visit *Cbina* as well as they. The *Grecian* and *Roman* Philosophers, who had in vain sought with their utmost diligence for right notions of religion, and the means of pleasing God, and making themselves happy, were, long before Christ's coming, taught by *Plato* to expect an instructor sent from God, to inform them about such matters. *Alexander* the Great, having been invited by an apparition in the figure and dress of *Jaddus*, the *Jewish* High-Priest, went over into *Asia*, and conquered all the countries from the *Mediterranean*, and the *Hellespont*, to the *Ganges*; and he and his followers established the *Grecian* arts and language throughout that extended empire, which

which comprehended *Egypt* also, and the adjacent countries. The language of this empire, which exceeded those of all other countries in beauty, regularity, and preciseness of expression, was also the learned and fashionable language of the *Romans*, who, after making themselves masters of the Western world, added the *Greek* empire to their conquests; by which means the *Greek* tongue, being understood both in the East and West, became an admirable vehicle for the religious knowledge that was to be conveyed by it to the world. Such were the preparatives to that fulness of time, spoken of in Scripture for the introduction of a true and universal religion. After the nations had been thus united by conquest, by commerce, and by a general language, the *Jews*, who saw by the prophecies of *Jacob* and *Daniel*, that the time for their deliverance was approaching, vainly believing, that their Messiah was to be a temporal Prince, and to advance them to an empire over all the world, published certain verses, under the name of *Sibylline Oracles*, to give them the greater credit with the *Romans*. In one of these, which were all founded on the prophecy of *Daniel*, it was foretold, that at the time when *Pompey* took *Jerusalem*, nature was about to bring forth a King for the *Roman* people; at which, says *Suetonius*, the Senate being frightened, made a decree, that no child born that year should be brought up. In another they foretold the rise of an Heavenly Kingdom, which should prevail, as soon as the *Romans* should conquer the *Egyptians*. In a third they predicted the same, upon the extinction of the *Lagean* line, which happened at the death of *Cleopatra*. These pretended oracles, which the *Jews* spread about every-where, received no small addition of credit from a very old prophecy, which, according to *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*, was taken from the sacred writings of the Priests, and foretold that a mighty King should be born among the *Jews*, who should govern the whole world. By these, and such-like means, howsoever otherwise they might have been intended by the contrivers, the expectation of some very extraordinary person was raised, and that expectation universally spread, and directed to one and the same place and time. In that place, and at that



time, was Christ born. Thus, Sir, from the very transgression of our first parents, the means of redemption and salvation commenced in a revelation. A promise was given to our first parents, that *the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent*. The celebration of the Sabbath, an abhorrence of incest, the practice of sacrificial atonements, and of sacerdotal mediation, with many other notices of the like nature, were divinely revealed, and handed down to posterity. The propagation of these, with the improvement of arts, sciences, and languages, the planting of colonies, the rise and growth of empires, the extensive intercourse occasioned by trade, the warlike expeditions both by land and sea, the general course of conquests, captivities, and political alliances, were all so disposed and directed by Almighty God, as to prepare the world for his Son's arrival. Curiosity and vanity may raise disputes among Philosophers, and those disputes create infinite doubts and uncertainties. Ambition and revenge may breed quarrels among Kings, and those quarrels make hideous havock and distraction in the world; yet out of all this confusion shall God bring order. The short-sightedness of human science shall prove the necessity of Divine revelation. The pride, and tyranny, and wars of Princes, shall pave the way for true liberty and peace. The Philosopher shall dispute, and the Commander, tho' he thinks of nothing less, shall conquer, for Christ; who, tho' *he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet hath he now his portion with the great, yet doth he now divide the spoil with the strong*. He gathers where Prophets and Philosophers have strewed; he reaps where Kings have sown. That prodigious empire, which it cost so much worldly wisdom, and labour, and blood, to raise; which was extended from *Scythia* to *Numidia*, from *India* to the *British* Isles; after it hath ten times made war upon him, and persecuted him with fire and sword, he conquers with the celestial armour of truth, righteousness, peace, and the word of God. We cannot sufficiently admire the wisdom of God in such a wonderful disposition of events, in sending the necessary religion into the world in the most knowing age, when its credentials could be best examined, and its vouchers best recorded;

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nor his power in supporting it against the united policy and strength of the whole world. But such are the effects, when God works. Occurrences and transactions at an infinite distance shall, by the extensive schemes of Providence, be brought together, and united in his designs. I must now beg pardon, Gentlemen, for having so long engrossed your attention; but the topic was fruitful and important; and I assure you, I have given you only a small part of what I could, and perhaps ought to have said upon it.

*Temp.* An apology, Sir, cannot be needed in behalf of that which we have so much reason to thank you for.

*Shep.* You are very indulgent, and I promise not to trespass so far upon your patience again.

*Dech.* It is past One, and compliments would be but impertinent, if we had more time. Mr. *Shepherd*, long as you have harangued, and far as you have gone about the bush, you have still left the greater part of mankind, both before and after Christ, to utter reprobation.

*Shep.* No, Sir, I have left them to infinite Wisdom and Mercy; I have left them to their Creator, who will require no more of them than he hath given them, and who can provide for their salvation by ways and means unknown and inconceivable to you and me. If you can shew me any true religion more efficacious, or more universally communicated to mankind, than the Christian, I am ready to quit that, and close with yours immediately.

*Dech.* What do you think of the religion of nature?

*Shep.* I think, after the corruption of that nature, its light became too dim for the discovery of true religion. But, whatever informations it was qualified to give us, it must have made a most unequal distribution of them, in proportion to the great inequality of mens capacities. So imperfect was this light, so feeble and uncertain, that society and civil government could in no country rest upon it; and so unequally was it dispensed to different countries, and different individuals, that, if this is an objection of any weight, it lies more strongly against natural than revealed religion, and therefore better fits the mouth of an Atheist than a Deist. Can you give me an instance

of any country, in which some, either real or pretended, revelation was not the established religion, and the basis of civil society? Hath any historian or traveller given you any information of a people, who believe in nothing concerning God, but what each man draws from within himself; and who do not follow the customs and traditions of their forefathers in matters of religion? If Christianity came late into the world, what you call natural religion came full as late; and there are no footsteps of natural religion, in any sense of the words, to be found at this day, but where Christianity hath planted it. In every place else religion hath no conformity with reason or truth; so far is the light of nature from lending sufficient assistance. It is strange, that the natural light should be so clear, and yet the natural darkness so great, that in all unassisted countries the most monstrous forms of religion, derogatory to God, and prejudicial to man, should be contrived by some, and swallowed by the rest with a voracious credulity. I could wish most heartily, that all the nations of the earth were Christians; yet, since it is otherwise, we derive this advantage from it, that we have a standing and contemporary demonstration of that, which nature, left to herself, can do. Had all the world been Christians for some ages past, our present Libertines would insist, that Christianity had done no service to mankind; that nature could have sufficiently directed herself; and that all the stories told, either in sacred or profane history, of the idolatry and horrible forms of religion in ancient times, were forged by Christian Priests, to make the world think revelation necessary, and natural reason incapable of dictating true and right notions of religion. But, as the case stands at present, we have such proofs of the insufficiency of unassisted reason in this behalf, as all the subtilty of Libertines is unable to evade.

*Dech.* If all this, and ten times as much of this sort of reasoning, were admitted, it would only prove, that natural religion is not adequate to the wants of men; but by no means that Christianity is. Now our present question is not about natural, but revealed religion.

*Shep.* It is very true; but you have already acknowledged, Sir, that religion of some sort or other is absolutely  
necessary

necessary to the wants of men. You will further acknowledge, I believe, that there can be but two sorts of religion, namely, natural and revealed. If then natural religion is inadequate to our wants, revealed must be sufficient; or else you must conclude, contrary to your own principles concerning the infinite goodness and justice of God, that he hath not given us that, which, by the very frame of our nature, he hath made necessary to our main happiness.

*Deib.* It is enough for me to have shewn, that my religion is universal, and consequently fit for God to give, and answerable to the purposes and wants of men: it is now your time to shew as much in favour of yours, which, I think, you have not yet done.

*Shep.* I have, I think, shewn, that of all religions ours is the most antient, the most universal, and the fittest religion to answer the purposes of mankind.

*Temp.* As far as my little knowlege of mankind carries me, it appears to me, that ignorance of vice, and its incentives, does more towards making a people harmless, and preserving them uncorrupted, than knowlege of virtue, or its rules. As the nations least acquainted with arts, sciences, and commerce, which spring in a good measure from luxury, are always the best and happiest of people, altho' their religion be very defective, so revelation, which requires arts, sciences, and commerce, to propagate and hand it down, was, in my opinion, sent to accompany those corrupters of human nature, where-ever they went; and to preserve some at least from vice, who might be the cement of society, and unite the rest, whose passions are too highly exalted by refinement and luxury, to be confined within due bounds. This seems to quadrate exactly with the *Mosaic* account of the fall, which tells us, that knowlege and corruption came together into the world. It agrees also with experience; for the most debauched nations have ever been, and still are, the most knowing. Thus Providence seems, by a wise and wonderful contrivance, to have made knowlege, which brought sin into the world, help to carry it out again.



*Dech.* The thought is ingenious; but the antient *Grecians* and *Romans*, and the present *Chinese*, whom we must allow to have made the greatest progress both in knowledge and luxury, knew nothing of revelation.

*Shep.* That is more than can be proved. All they knew of true religion they were taught traditionally. As to their corrupt notions, and idolatries, you will grant, I am sure, they were of their own invention; and I will insist, they were the inventions of nature degenerate, and reason ill-informed. The *Grecians*, who were by far the most knowing people of the three you have mentioned, were as gross idolaters as the rest, till *Plato's* time. He travelled into the East, and came home with better notions of theology, which he derived from tradition, than the other Philosophers of his time were masters of. He ran higher towards truth in his sentiments of religion, than others; but still worshiped the Gods of his country, and durst not speak out all he knew. However, he formed a great school, and, both thro' his writings and scholars, instructed his countrymen in a kind of religious philosophy, that tended much more directly and strongly to reformation of manners, than either the dictates of their own reason, or of their other Philosophers. So much of your notion, Mr. *Templeton*, seems rational enough, that the nature of tradition makes the propagation of religion most easy among those, who stand most in need of a perfect religion.

*Dech.* If there be no salvation, but thro' the name of *Jesus*, as we are told in the fourth of the *Acts*; if faith in the Christian religion, as we are told in many places of the New Testament, is necessary to eternal salvation; all the Heathens, who never heard of the name of *Jesus*, nor of his religion, and all the *Jews* and *Mahometans*, who believe in neither, must be damned.

*Shep.* And if the light of nature be universally clear, and we must act up to it in order to please God, all *Heathens*, *Jews*, *Mahometans*, and *Christians*, that is, the whole world, must be lost and damned; because they have all, excepting a few Deists, acted against the plainest dictates of nature and reason, in admitting for religion, what the Deists tells us, from the clearest lights of nature,

is downright superstition or idolatry; and, besides, have by their lives and conversations, violated every article of the natural law.

*Dech.* This is still but the poor shift of throwing the imputation of a damning principle off yourselves, upon us; whereas it is your present business to clear yourselves. It is impossible, however, to rid your religion of this difficulty: Either men can be saved without the Christian religion, in which case there is no occasion for it; or the greater part of mankind must be damned for want of knowledge, which neither was, nor so much as could be, proposed to them.

*Temp.* Do you really think it impossible, upon the Christian scheme, to lay aside that difficulty?

*Dech.* Absolutely impossible. The Christian religion says, there is no salvation, but thro' faith in the name of *Jesus*. This damns all who never heard of that name, unless you will say, that people may believe in a name they never heard of.

*Temp.* As we see but a small part of the schemes of Providence, so much only as is necessary to our wants, and cannot dive into the secrets of God, farther than he hath been pleased to reveal them to us, he may have ways and means, impossible to be conceived by us, to clear up this formidable dilemma. Ignorant, however, as I am, of what God can do, I think I can point to two possibilities, by which this difficulty may be got over.

*Dech.* As they must be great curiosities, I shall be glad to hear them from so able a Divine.

*Temp.* If the souls of those who died, or shall die, under the darkness of Paganism, should be permitted to transmigrate into bodies born under the light of the Gospel, your whole impossibility would vanish in an instant.

*Dech.* You have the finest and shortest way of solving difficulties, that ever was heard of. And so you call in *Pythagoras* to assist *Jesus*, and in a way too, which the religion of the latter can hardly admit of.

*Temp.* The Christian religion hath no-where, that I know of, condemned the transmigration of a soul from one human body to another.

*Dech.* No, nor from the body of a man to that of a beast.

*Temp.* My other solution for your difficulty seems a little more agreeable to revelation.

*Dech.* Let us have it, if it be but half as ingenious as the former.

*Temp.* The most antient Fathers, who best knew the principles of our religion, so understood, I am told, the passage in the first Epistle of St. Peter concerning Christ's going by his Spirit to preach to the spirits in prison, who were some time disobedient in the days of Noah, together with some other places of Scripture, as to be of opinion, that Christ, between his death and resurrection, went into the place of departed souls, and there preached the Gospel to those souls who had left the world before he came into it; and by that means gave them an opportunity of faith and salvation thro' his meritorious death. Many of the modern Divines, and our Church in Edward the Sixth's time, as I found yesterday in Pearson on the Creed, expounded these texts in the same manner, and were of the same opinion with the Fathers in this matter: and tho' the Church of England, in Queen Elizabeth's time, did not in its articles require subscription to this doctrine at the hands of its Clergy, yet it left them to their own opinions therein, and was far from condemning it, either as erroneous or heretical. Now, Sir, if this doctrine be agreeable to truth and Scripture, as it possibly may, for ought you or I know, it will intirely defeat your grand impossibility.

*Dech.* Very ingenious indeed! And pray, Sir, what provision do you make for the souls of Pagans, who departed this life since Christ was among the dead? They seem to have come too late.

*Temp.* What provision was made for the ages succeeding Christ in this world! Was there not a succession of ministers and preachers instituted to perpetuate revelation? And is it impossible that something like this could have been done among the dead?

*Dech.* Phoo! Are we to be pestered with Parsons, and sermons, in the other world too? No, no, *Templeton*, there are no tythes in the other world, and consequently  
no

no Parsons. Pray, Mr. *Shepherd*, what do you say to the hypothesis of the learned Dr. *Templeton*? I fancy you will not much approve of it, because it looks so like new light.

*Shep.* I say this, that it totally overturns your impossibility, because it is itself possible, and may serve to shew us, that we are not rashly to limit the power of God, or to say what he will, or will not do. His secrets are unsearchable. It is enough for us, that he provides for our salvation. Let us leave the rest of his creatures to himself, and not reject his tenders of mercy to us, merely because he hath not thought fit to tell us what he intends to do with others. He hath given you an ample fortune: you will not, I believe, throw it up, purely because he hath not explained his reasons to you for leaving so many of your fellow creatures in want and distress. He hath given you very good abilities of mind, and great opportunities of acquiring knowledge, by which you have been enabled to discover the law and religion of nature: you will not, I hope, turn apostate to your own principles, because there are many thousands, whose natural reason is so weak, as to render them utterly incapable of that discovery, and of defending themselves against the craft and encroachment of our Priests. The mysteries of Providence in respect to other things, as well as to the dispensations of religion, are as much above our comprehension, as those of the Divine nature. All things in the moral and political world, as well as in the natural, become inconceivable and unaccountable to us, when we attempt to pry farther than our talents are able to carry us; which is just so far only, as our wants require. This deference is paid to the mysteries of government, that the Peasant thinks himself unable to comprehend the schemes of his King; and, if he believes him to be a wise and able ruler, he will dutifully acquiesce in his administration, even when it seems to run against his notions of prudence. Yet the Peasant knows his Prince to be but a man. You, Mr. *Dechaine*, are still more ignorant in respect to the interests of the universe, and the policy of the King of Kings. You cannot tell, why the wise and good man, who labours to instruct and reform the world, is persecuted,



cuted, and put to death, for so doing, and all his useful knowledge and virtues buried with him in the grave. You cannot tell why the deceitful, the cruel, the abandoned monster is permitted to prosper, to corrupt the world with his bad principles and vices, to disturb the peace of his country with his ambition, to oppress thousands of better men than himself, to wage ruinous wars, and spread death and desolation round him wheresoever he goes. You cannot see so far into the schemes of Providence, nor are you so well acquainted with the government of the world, as to account for the revolutions of kingdoms, the rise and decay of empires, arts, commerce, and religions, on which the affairs of mankind so necessarily depend. It will be no disparagement to your reason to say, these things are too high for it, too deep for the measure of your understanding to fathom, and too extensive in their connexion with the general schemes of him, who plans and projects for a boundless empire, to be comprehended by so narrow a capacity as yours. But, after all, your difficulty, concerning the impossibility of saving the Heathen upon Christian principles, hardly deserves the name of a difficulty; for those sentences of Scripture that seem to condemn them, admit of a more rational interpretation, when applied to those, who heard the Gospel, and rejected it; which interpretation is more suitable, than yours, to the charitable and comprehensive spirit of the Gospel, and more consistent with other passages of Scripture, that intimate mercy to them, as we had occasion to observe towards the end of our third conference.

*Temp.* **H**AVING dwelt sufficiently on this point, I think it is high time to call a new one. Mr. *Dechaine*, I believe, is not yet exhausted of objections.

*Dech.* I have all I ever had. I could propose about five hundred more; but as it will be soon necessary to break up for this day, I shall offer one, which is alone sufficient to answer the end of all the rest; and, therefore, I shall conclude with it. People may argue for and profess a thing they are very far from believing. They may have an interest in speaking what they do not think; and, provided

provided those they speak to be ignorant and simple enough, they may talk them into an opinion, which they themselves know to be false. But we have a much surer way of knowing the principles of men, than by their words; that is, by their actions. I have dealt largely with people of all ranks and conditions, who call themselves Christians; and that in a country, the most illuminated of any in the Christian world: and I never yet found more than two or three among them who acted, as if they were sure their conduct must lead them into either of those distant places, which Christians call *Heaven* and *Hell*. I found in some men an appearance of such a faith, and in others I could just discern an almost imperceptible degree of it; but both this degree, and that appearance, vanished into mere vapour, the moment they came to the test of a considerable profit, or a great pleasure, to be obtained, or enjoyed, at the expence of their religious professions. I have found also, that the more knowing the people were, whom I had an opportunity of looking into by the open window of their actions, the less Christianity I always perceived within. The wisest statesmen, the ablest lawyers, the deepest divines, were the farthest removed from a weak faith, and the most disengaged from the trammels of the gospel. Now, Sir, to confess the truth, I thought it evident, that the Christian religion wanted proof and foundation, since it was able to convince nobody: and I likewise saw, it would be a ridiculous singularity in me, to tie up my own hands with a parcel of chimerical hopes and fears, when those of all the world about me were either intirely loose, or only manacled with straws, and spiders threads.

*Shep.* I know not how it is in the grand world; but sure I am, that, in this low and plain world I live in, there are some real Christians.

*Dech.* Look ye, Mr. *Shepherd*, ignorant people know nothing of your religion; its mysteries are too high, and its authorities too learned, for their examination; consequently they cannot be Christians: and, as these know nothing of the matter, so their betters believe as little.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* You may possibly have judged a little hardly, or rashly, of the great ones; and I am sure you do of the small. I have conversed with some judicious men, who have spent as many of their days at the upper end of the world, as you have done, and been deeply engaged in a great variety of affairs, as well as you; and, altho' they lament the great corruption, both in principles and manners, which hath seized the court and city, yet they bring down a favourable report of some whom they had tried, and found true Christians, both in head and heart. I, who have often changed my situation, and been tossed about thro' various parts of *England*, have, it is true, been much shocked with the great decay of piety and virtue I observed in most places; but then I have been comforted, on the other hand, with the clear sense, and strong faith, and exemplary lives, of great numbers, in all stations and conditions, whom I have been so happy as to be acquainted with. A man may be very wise in worldly affairs, and ignorant enough in religious matters, to which if he hath given little or nothing of his time or application, it is impossible he should know much of their evidence; and it is natural he should disrelish the little he does know, if his thoughts and inclinations are turned the quite contrary way, to profits and pleasures, condemned by the first principles of religion. To make such a man as this one's guide and example in things which he is so ignorant of, merely because he is sharp and cunning in other things, is a foolish and a dangerous choice. We do not consult with a Lawyer about our health, nor with a Physician about our estate, be they ever so sufficient in their own professions. Nay, in things which we can be judges of ourselves, we trust to nobody but ourselves; and such are the merits and differences of religions, that all people can judge sufficiently of them, if they will but give the half of that attention to them, which they do to their worldly affairs. But I observe, there are no sort of men more slavishly led along by example and authority, by vogue and fashion, and those of the idlest sort, than such as pretend most to think for themselves. All they say on this subject is, it seems, but mere prate and cant. They cannot go to Heaven, unless

it

it is in such a throng of fellow-travellers, as may bear their feet off the ground, and pull or push them forward by a motion not their own; and because the narrow way is not much crouded with passengers, these Free-thinkers, altho' they pretend to walk in singular and solitary ways of their own, desert it; and, shutting themselves up in the dark vehicle of bad authority, are carried downward, at the discretion of him who drives, the Lord knows whither.

*Dech.* But, if there is any truth, or real good in Christianity, surely the Clergy must be sensible of it. They are bred to it from their infancy, and must know their own trade: but there is nobody farther from God, than he who lives nearest, nay, than he who lives in, and by, the Church. You Clergy, *Shepherd*, draw from the original fountain itself; and, if you have nothing but muddy waters, either for your own use, or that of your flocks, it shews your fountain is not so clear, as it should be. The Clergy of any religion, as *Julian* observes, become sureties for the Divinity they profess to serve, and reflect credit or dishonour on their religion, and its author, according to the good or evil example they set. *Hobbes*, among other causes of the decay of religion which he reckons up, seems to think the ill lives of its preachers a very material one (*a*). And, indeed, it seems most unreasonable, that people should receive such principles from any set of men, as those very men flatly and openly contradict in all their actions. But we have had, you will say, good Clergymen in former times, and such as, by mortifying all their corruptions, and dying in our cause, give a glorious testimony in its favour. But, Sir, we have only your own word for these enthusiastic sufferings and testimonies, supposed to have accompanied your religion in ages long since past, and vaunted in our own times with a world of pomp and flourish. You tell us Deists, that the mortifications and self-denials, required by your religion, are what makes Libertines of us all. But I am sure any Deist, tho' of never so free a spirit, may easily practise as much self-denial, as our good *orthodox Protestant* Clergy

(*a*) *Leviathan*, chap. 12.



Clergy do; and that, you will grant, must be enough for the mere purpose of being a Christian. I must own, were the *new birth* to be taken strictly and literally, as, they say, that mad-cap fellow *Whitefield* understands it, and not allegorically, as, I hope, all sound Divines interpret it, this would be a most frightful doctrine, and we Deists could not, in that sense, be Christians. But, as the Christian duties are qualified and lowered by the practice of the Clergy, I think, it is no difficult matter to live like a Christian, and pass muster among the very best of you. But the world will not be always amused.

“ It is most true, that the ill lives of the Clergy every-  
 “ where, their pride, hypocrisy, rage, and avarice, con-  
 “ bute too evidently to hurt religion, which they thus  
 “ disgrace, and seem not to believe. Hence all their  
 “ reasonings for it, especially where with such reasonings  
 “ they confound their own selfish principles, are despised;  
 “ and some people may perhaps come to doubt the  
 “ Being of a God, because they who call themselves  
 “ his ministers, live and act as if they thought there  
 “ were none (*a*). If Clergymen would avoid contempt,  
 “ let them avoid the causes of it; let them not be hunt-  
 “ ing after honours, courting preferments, and bustling  
 “ for riches; let them not join in factions, and foment  
 “ rebellions; let them not brave heaven by swear-  
 “ ing falsely; let them not make slaves of the people,  
 “ nor encourage tyranny in the Prince. Let not those  
 “ of them, who gratify brutish appetites, and live in  
 “ sensuality, add want of shame to their want of grace,  
 “ and bewail the contempt they meet with, while they  
 “ are deserving it. Why should they, of all men, be  
 “ exempted from censure, whose employment swells a  
 “ fault into a vice, and a vice into a crime? The san-  
 “ ctity of any calling, instead of cloaking or excusing,  
 “ exposes to utter detestation the bad behaviour of him  
 “ who fills it. I do not know by what judgment or  
 “ fatality it comes to pass, that if you but touch the  
 “ pretences or vices of the meanest Ecclesiastics, so  
 “ many of their body is in an uproar. Touch a galled

(*a*) *Ind. Whig, Vol. 3. Exam. &c. of Bp. of Chichester's Sermon.*

“ horse,

" horse, and he will wince, though it is in order to  
 " cure him. The eleven Apostles lost no part of their  
 " honour, when *Judas* hanged himself; nor would any  
 " honest Clergyman, though ever so many of the other  
 " sort did the same, or if it was done for them (*b*).  
 " The first holy messengers (for that I take to be the  
 " highest Apostolic style) brought with them their proper  
 " credentials, in their lives, their manners, and beha-  
 " viour, as well as in powerful works, and signs from  
 " heaven. And tho', indeed, it might well be esteemed  
 " a miracle in the kind, should our present messengers  
 " set up to represent their predecessors in any part of  
 " their demeanour or conversation (*c*)," yet sure I am,  
 they cannot reasonably expect we should reverence them  
 as God's embassadors, nor regard their dictates as the  
 revelations of God, till, by their lives and conversa-  
 tions, they put on some resemblance of the Master they  
 pretend to serve. Now it is not the exterior habit of  
 their employment, that will give them this resemblance,  
 or procure them any regard with reasonable people.  
 " They can challenge no respect by their habit, when  
 " they have forfeited it by their behaviour. There is  
 " no holiness in garments. A black gown has neither  
 " more understanding, nor manners, than a black cloak:  
 " but if their dress is the flag of their commission, and  
 " they have actually God's commission in their pockets,  
 " and yet will engage in another service; what name  
 " and treatment do they merit! Can men succeed to  
 " the Apostles with the qualities and behaviour of apo-  
 " states? A Clergyman who is as bad as an ill Layman,  
 " is, consequently, worse. In a sanctified character  
 " there is no medium between doing good, and doing  
 " mischief; since the power of example is stronger than  
 " that of precept (*d*)." What is it hinders Christiani-  
 tity from spreading, in either the *East* or *West Indies*?  
 Is it not because the polite and rational *Cbinese*, *Japo-  
nese*, &c. cannot digest its mysteries? Is it not because  
 the honest and uncorrupted *Americans* cannot like a re-

(*b*) Ind. Whig, Vol. 1. No. 3.

(*c*) *Shafes.* Charact. Vol. 3. p. 336, 337.

(*d*) Ind. Whig. No. 41.

ligion professed by the wickedest of men? Were it any way helpful towards virtue, say they, *those who know its principles, and bask in its light, would not be so apt to go astray.* Now what the *Americans* say of Christians in general, the Laity say here at home of the Clergy: thus mysteries in the *East*, Christian vices in the *West*, and Clerical vices all over *Europe*, bear down your religion, which now stands in more need of miracles to support it, when so many of the Clergy desert or betray it, than it did of old, when its preachers, they say, were better men. No Layman, ambitious of rising in the world, can serve the times with more assiduity than you Clergy. In all our revolutions and changes of government the Clergy are ever among the foremost to quit their principles and oaths, to fall in with the new system of politics, and take the advantage of the tide, in order to make a good voyage to preferment (e). It is, no doubt on't, a great argument of your sincerity, that so few among you dare preach or speak out your old notions of Christianity, but basely give them up, as opinions of no truth or moment, and betray them by guarded and evasive expressions, or by a prudential silence, when Libertinism is making such prodigious strides upon you, lest you should seem to go against the current, and thereby prevent your own promotion. It is at the expence of what was once taken to be Christianity, that many of you rise to opulence and grandeur; and yet you would have us travel in the narrow thorny road! But why do you not shew us the way, Gentlemen? You say, you are in the narrow way: it may be so; but then I am sure it is well mended since Christ's time, if it can be travelled in a coach and six, and hath palaces for inns all along. You tell us a thousand fine things of heaven, as often as you get into a pulpit; but when you come down again, this little contemptible world, which you have been declaiming against, and declaring war with, even serves your turn, as well as ours. *St. Evremont* says, *he doubts the persuasion of a preacher, who promises the kingdom of heaven in every*

(e) See An account of the rise and growth of Deism, and Ind. Whig, No. 43.

*sermon*; and yet *solicits*, with the greatest earnestness, for some paltry benefice. No sort of men in his neighbourhood live, in general, upon better terms with *Paludes*, than the *Papists*, *Dissenters*, and *Deists*: he gives them no opposition, never once enters into religious debates with them, nor labours to defend his flock against the successful encroachments of such as make proselytes to any of these parties; but if any one is tardy in the payment of his dues, or carries his reluctance into a lawsuit, then it is that the zeal of this excellent Divine, this Pastor of Christ's flock, this Father of the Church, flames out in its full lustre and vigour: then who such a disputant as he? Who hath the Church, and the interest of religion, so often in his mouth, as *Paludes*? For in what does the welfare of the Church, or the true interest of religion, consist, but in the punctual payment of great and small tythes? So many of you are of the same turn and spirit with this Gentleman, that *Paludes* is rather the term of a species, than the name of an individual. There is a most observable difference between the warmth, with which your dues are contended for, and that exercised by you for the support and credit of Christianity. This I must take the liberty to tell you, that if you sincerely believed in the Christian religion, you would be more solicitous about your conduct, and its honour: but altho' it is the Church, rather than Religion, you are all so anxious to support; and you are apt to cry out, on all occasions, *The Church is in danger*; I must remind you, and you ought all of you to hear it with both your ears, that nothing can endanger it so much, as your own misbehaviour. But what said a great Dignitary, when somebody made this observation to him? *Why*, quoth the Father, *I believe the Church will last out my time*. Was it not honestly said? Another would, on the like occasion, have either endeavoured to vindicate the Clergy, or have bewailed the ill carriage of his brethren, as if he had himself a right to throw his stone. What a scandalous trade is driven upon the wealth of the Church, which our bigoted ancestors, in the blindness of their zeal, dedicated to the service of religion! Blood, recommendation, and flattery,

are



are the means by which promotion is arrived at. Is this owing to a disregard of merit and standing? Or is it owing to a want of merit sufficient to distinguish such as ought to be raised in the Church? When *Hooker's* book of *Ecclesiastical Polity* was shewn to the *Pope*, and he was told how poorly the author was provided for; *I am not afraid of that Church*, said he, *which neglects such men as Hooker*. I need not expatiate on a remark, so much fitter for the meditation of those who steer the Church. The education of the Clergy is the chief cause of all that bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and pride, that so remarkably distinguish them from other men (a); they are trained up intirely by Clergymen, as it were, to a craft, or trade: they are confined to one track of notions, and never suffered to look beyond the contracted system of prejudices, with which they are obliged to furnish their minds, into any thing that breathes the air of freedom. The bulk of them make little or no proficiency even in this false kind of erudition; and yet expect, when they mount the pulpit, to be heard with as great deference and resignation, as if they were uttering oracles. You will hear one of these fellows attempting,

Tho' no wiser than *Waltham's* calf,  
To speak on God's behalf:

defending Christianity with demonstration upon demonstration, and accounting for the mystery of the Trinity with an explanation, no less difficult to be understood, than the thing itself. Those of them, on whom nature hath bestowed a talent, come out from the dugs of their *Alma Mater* with a sort of learning, worse than ignorance itself, because it is fitted only to mislead or embroil the world. Were I a Bishop, before I would ordain one of this stamp, I would administer to him a large portion of a certain root, which the old natives of *Virginia* were wont to give to all candidates for the Priesthood. Its operation was very surprising: it totally deprived the youth, to whom it was given, of all his former ideas, passions, inclinations, and aversions, which might have rendered him unfit for his holy employment;

(a) *Ind. Whig*, No. 5.

ment; and gave him a fair piece of white paper within, on which notices, more refined and useful, might be transcribed from better heads. After this, if I gave the candidate any instructions at all, he should have a *Parson* and a *Deist* for his tutors, to the end that his now-untinctured understanding might have an equal balance, on both sides, to keep it trim.

*Shep.* A very fine preparation for the Priesthood!

*Dech.* In short, *Shepherd*, such, and so flagrant, are the vices, the hypocrisy, the avarice, the pride, and the ignorance of your order, that altho' they should all preach by glasses, each of them large enough to contain an hog'shead of sand, and measure their defences by the gallons of ink exhausted in them; they would never be able to make the wiser part of the world believe, they had either any faith in, or regard for, Christianity. If you believed in the Christian religion, you would have some tenderness for its credit; and were you not determined to insult over the bigotry and tameness of the world, you would never persevere so serenely in such enormities as I have only touched on with too much tenderness, and in the general; when you are sensible, the world all about you is shockingly particular in its censures of the Clergy; and, from railing at them, proceeds to question the truth of what they preach. Now, Sir, you may begin and prove, in your demonstrative way, that the Clergy are Saints or Angels; but you must excuse me, if your rhetoric should prove too weak for my senses and experience.

*Shep.* On the contrary, Sir, I shall defend them no otherwise, than by reminding you, that they are only men, men of like infirmities with yourself; and even by beseeching you to think of them with less admiration, than I find you do; for surely you cannot make them an higher compliment than implicitly to form your own principles by the weak and unguarded part of their conduct. I perceive, Mr. *Dechaine*, you have acted like a skilful orator, and reserved your strongest argument against Christianity, which consists in ridicule and railery, for the last. Nay, what you have here objected to the behaviour of the Clergy, derives still greater force from

from fact and truth, than from the keenness of your invective; inasmuch as some things you have charged us with, are too notorious to be denied, and too flagrant to be excused. There is no one thing the Deists oftener object to Christian writers, than the uncharitable and ungentlemanlike acrimony with which they attack their adversaries. But who, among us, ever railed at the most virulent and disingenuous of our adversaries, in such a style as yours, or in such a speech as this you have huddled together, the substance and turn of which, I observe, is common-placed out of the most celebrated books on your side? How insensible is the assurance of these men, who, while they rail and bespatter with the greatest bitterness, and in the coarsest language, rail at nothing so bitterly, or so abusively, as the liberty they themselves are taking, if but nibbled at by their opponents! This is acting like a certain justice of the peace, who swore a thundering oath, that he would set a poor fellow in the stocks, for only swearing a petty one. Among other things, you charge the Clergy with state-perjury; by which you can point at nothing else but their taking the new oaths at the late *revolution*. But could that *revolution* have ever been brought about, had not the generality, of both Laity and Clergy, thought themselves discharged of their former oaths to King *James*, by his trampling on the coronation oath, and thereby unkinging himself? The Nonjurors were Papists and bigots, because they would not swear to Queen *Mary* and King *William*; and those that did were traitors and *Atheists*. I hope you can give better proofs than this, of your attachment to the present happy settlement. Are the *Deists* really angry at the *revolution*? And could nothing have given it to us, but perjury? This I am sure of, that neither the *Pope*, nor the *Pretender*, could have laid down a better doctrine to prevent or reverse it. Your objections to the education of the Clergy have something in them that puzzles me not a little. You would not have them educated by Clergymen; and why? Because they will be apt to imbibe the notions of their tutors. This they will do in the same measure, educate them who will. They are therefore to have no education.

education. But perhaps you will allow them a little. Where? At the dancing-school, or the *Temple*? If the Barristers are to breed the Clergy, let the Clergy breed the Lawyers. The reasons for the latter are, at least, equal to the reasons for the former; and they are neither more, nor less, than this, that the professors, in any branch of knowledge, are always the most unfit persons in the world to teach it; because they will certainly instil their own notions into the minds of such as are committed to their care. How much were it to be wished, that the professors of all sciences would make it a rule to instruct their pupils in principles directly contrary to such as they themselves take for truths! You charge those with partiality, who fill the vacancies of the Church, and make this an argument of their unbelief. This is an high compliment to Christianity; for it must be your opinion, that if they were really Christians, they could not be partial; and that, in order to act the part you ascribe to them, they must be Libertines and Deists. What I have suffered by the partiality you censure, was so remarkable, that no one can be more unfit to speak to such a subject. Should I seem to join in the censure, you would ascribe it to resentment; and should I offer at a vindication, you would charge me with speaking in the prudential strain of an expectant; so that, either way, all I could say to you would pass for nothing. All men, who have principles of religion and honesty, act in some things, and on some occasions, against those principles; for men are but men. None, but the most flagitious actions, can argue the infidelity of the agent. Before we attribute the partiality of those, who govern the Church, to an utter want of principles, let us impartially examine our own consciences, and, perhaps, we shall find, that, notwithstanding our principles, we have been sometimes led, thro' human frailty, and by the customs of the world, to act as they do. If this should be the case, it will become us to be silent, and to acquiesce in that which Providence, and the laws of our country, permit. All Bishops do not act the part you accuse them with, and such as sometimes do, often act otherwise; and, in either case, are almost



equally liable to censure, thro' the defects of those they promote. The eyes of the selfish and ill-natured world are on the well-beneficed Clergy; all their slips are marked and magnified; while such, as are stationed a little lower, are less observed, less envied, and therefore less maligned. Had it pleased some Bishop to advance me from my present obscurity, to a post more lucrative and conspicuous, he might, for ought I know, have been charged with partiality, and, by libertine detraction, even with infidelity, on account of my miscarriages. But if the misconduct of a Bishop, in one respect, shall call his principles in question; why may not the faithful discharge of his duty, in another, be allowed to prove, with as much weight, that he is really a Christian? I know some in that order, who, when they have good benefices to dispose of, can no more forget their friends, nor divest themselves of natural ties, than other men, on the like occasions; who nevertheless, throughout all the other parts of their conduct, shew a charity towards men, and a piety towards God, that can proceed from nothing else but a true sense of religion, and a real adherence to its principles. If the mere partiality of one, professing Christianity, shall be sufficient to prove him an unbeliever, surely the enormous crimes of one, professing Deism, ought to convince us, that his professions are altogether hypocritical, and that he is a real Atheist. If men are to be thus unmercifully censured, altho' we can neither see into their hearts, nor into the reasons of their conduct; there is an end of all benevolence or charity. We must first be wiser and better men ourselves, before we thus presume to usurp the prerogative of God, and sit in judgment on the behaviour of others.

*Dech.* Consider, *Shepherd*, no Bishop hears you; and therefore you had better keep this apology for the ears of their friends, who may report it to your advantage another day.

*Shep.* I speak not, Sir, to apologize for that, by which I have suffered; nor to flatter the Bishops into kinder sentiments of me, who am already provided for to my present satisfaction, and who renounce all claim to their  
notice,

notice, discharging them, before God and man, of the smallest obligation to think of me, when they are dispensing their favours. The observation, with which you closed your speech about our order, to wit, that our ill behaviour brings our faith in question, and strikes at the credit of Christianity, hath somewhat exceedingly alarming in it to the ears of a conscientious Clergyman; and, I must own, hath but too much foundation in fact and truth. Were the world made up of sensible and inquiring people, the conduct of the Clergy would be a thing of little consequence to any body but themselves; because, in that case, every one would rest his assent on his own researches and examinations into the truth of our religion itself, and not blindly pin his faith, whether Libertine or Christian, on the wicked or misconceived behaviour of another. But as the bulk of mankind, even of the great vulgar, as well as of the small, are incredibly careless, and inattentive to religious inquiries; and, what is still worse, prone to infidelity, and looking out sharp for fuel to inflame their loose dispositions, catching at occasions of disbelief, and incentives to their vices; a Clergyman owes no duty more indispensably, either to God, or his people, than an exemplary life and conversation; because nothing can so strongly tend, as the contrary, to corrupt an ill-inclined, and mislead an unwary world. A bad Clergyman is a net, spread by the enemy of human virtue and happiness, for the feet of heedless men: when I think of this, I am filled with horror at the thoughts of that behaviour, by which the more unworthy part of the Clergy refute their own sermons, and, while they only talk for God, act for his enemy. My horror rises in proportion as I carry this reflection still nearer to my own conscience, and consider, how often I, a messenger of God, and a teacher of others, have been false to him, in neglecting to press and enforce his message, and a stumbling-block to them, by means of my many indiscretions, and, what is worse (I blush and tremble when I confess it), by my abominable, by my repeated sins, which, I have but too much reason to fear, may have prompted some of

those who know me, to such doubts about religion, as they were ready enough to entertain of themselves.

*Temp.* O! Mr. *Shepherd*! I believe you have as little reason to reproach yourself for the example you have set, as some others have to boast of theirs.

*Dech.* He knows himself better than you do, and would not, for nothing, thus puritanically reflect on himself.

*Shep.* It is most true; and all the consolation I have to combat this frightful reflection with, is, that my poverty, and littleness in every respect, may possibly have rendered me too inconsiderable to have been much observed. If my low situation, and narrow circumstances, have blessed me with this happy insignificance and obscurity, I shall therein think myself much more fortunate than all the wealth and grandeur of the world could make me. I see religion suffers a worse persecution under those who preach and betray it, than it ever did under a *Nero*, or a *Dioclesian*. They vented their fury on the bodies, but we wound the souls, of Christians. The blood they shed impregnated the world with faith, and heroic virtue; but our vices are labouring to extinguish both in the breasts of mankind. I wish, indeed, Sir, that I, and all the Clergy in the kingdom, were every Day to hear such a lecture, as that you just now delivered, on the subject of our behaviour, and its consequences. But why do I wish this? We know such things are bellowed about in all places; nay, they are often thundered in our own ears, not only by the enemies of our religion, but by our ecclesiastical superiors, and those among the Laity who have its interest most at heart; and yet, as if many of us were possessed with some spirit of insatiation, it makes little or no impression on them.

*Dech.* No; for, *bearing, you cannot bear*. But to what end this hypocritical lamentation over the decaying, or rather expiring, principles of your religion, when I and all the world know, your sorrow is not for the principles, but the profits, not because religion is sinking, but the Church is in danger?

*Shep.* I did not want this proof to convince me you are no searcher of hearts; and that you only censure mine, by one you are better acquainted with. Religion, Sir, is the soul of the Church.

*Dech.* And is about to forsake the body, and to depart this life.

*Shep.* We may indeed say, with truth, that the Church is in danger, while religion is so coldly regarded by numbers, whose immediate office it is to support its spirit and reputation. While the adversaries of the Church are sapping its foundations, and firing upon its most combustible parts with red-hot bullets, how many of its watchmen are fast asleep! how many instruct the enemy where to point their batteries, and are opening its doors to others, too like themselves, who enter for no other purpose, but to make plunder of its wealth! I can compare the present state of our religion to nothing so justly, as to that of a ship at sea in a dreadful storm: the wind and thunder beat furiously on it from above, as if heaven were angry with its crew; the waves toss it to-and-fro, with infinite violence; and the deep from beneath opens its frightful mouth to swallow it up. It is surrounded with other vessels, which, insensible of the common danger, or rather despairing of their own safety, conspire, with the tempest, to destroy it. In the mean time, its sailors are, some intoxicated, some asleep, some diverting themselves below, and some sauntering about on deck, as if they were in the midst of a calm, and had no enemy in sight. The passengers curse the crew, and call to the enemy to take them on board.

*Dech.* And, surely, they are in the right on't. An hulk, in such a condition, must inevitably perish.

*Shep.* The preservation of religion, and the church of Christ, never depended wholly on men: its first preachers were, in themselves, altogether unqualified to stem the opposition they met with, or promote so forlorn a cause. Its advancement was an universal and glaring miracle, performed in the sight of all mankind; and its preservation hitherto, against the strong current of human corruptions, against the treachery of its professors, and the malicious cunning of its adversaries, is another



standing miracle in its favour, that gives us sufficient assurance of God's protection, pursuant to his promise, for the time to come. Your invective against the Clergy, useful as it may be to Mr. *Cunningham* and me, might have had a better effect on us, had you appeared to be less prompted by rage and prejudice against our order, and had you not been carried beyond the limits of truth by your resentment. We are not all profligates, nor all contemners of our duty, and betrayers of our Master; whereas you have lumped us in one promiscuous censure, which evidently demonstrates there is something more at the bottom of your aversion, than our mere misbehaviour. Besides, you bring against us a general charge of hypocrisy, which contradicts what you say about our open defiance against your censures, and our serenely insulting your tameness with a contemptuous perseverance in our vices; nor does it less contradict experience, and common observation.

*Dech.* I am sure you cannot safely appeal to experience for an openness of behaviour in the Clergy. Do they not herd together, and live apart from the Laity, as if afraid of being observed? Are they not ready, on all occasions, to screen the very loosest of their brethren, as if conscious of a like depravity in themselves, that may some time or other require the same indulgence?

*Sh.p.* This charge might fall with the more weight upon us, were we not accused by the same persons who bring it, with a want of brotherly love and charity for one another. How shall we act, when opposites, altho' both are far enough from being carried to extremes, are criminal in us? If we sometimes converse a little too much with one another, are we not often driven to it by the unkindness and disdain of our Lay-neighbours? Do we never stand up for one another, but in the wrong? Is no Clergyman ever falsely and maliciously traduced? Or, when he is, ought the rest of the Clergy to join in the cry? It is natural, and useful too, for persons of the same profession to be often together, and to be warmed with some affection for their brethren. You Gentlemen of the Law are, to the full, as apt to run into these practices, as we; and it must be your opinion,

nion, as well as ours, that neither practice is culpable, but when the one is employed in the defence of the unworthy; or the other, in contracting our hearts, and rendering them pedantically alien to other men, and to the common sentiments and affections of human nature. The Clergy of our Church are far enough from combination, and, indeed, as far from hypocrisy. There never was less worldly prudence shewn, by any set of men, in concealing their faults, than by them. The truth is, they despise your censures; and those of them, who are bad, being lost to all sense of shame, or tenderness for the credit of their office, are in no sort of pain about the remarks of mankind on their conduct. I know of no hypocrites among them, but those who lean to new light and Libertinism, and, by that treacherous advance towards you, betray Christianity to Deism: yet these base and disingenuous wretches, whom you know to be false to all their own solemn subscriptions and declarations, are almost the only men among us whom you will deign to speak favourably of (*a*). Altho' we are generally too strongly tinctured with the bad principles, and corrupt affections, of the degenerate age we live in, yet there are those of us who act with a becoming regard to the sacred importance of the high trust reposed in them by their Master. There are still some, both among our Bishops, and inferior Clergy, who, bad as the Laity is, out of whom we are made, and partial as the methods of promotion may be, by which men rise in the Church, do labour faithfully, by their writings, preachings, examples, and charities, in the cause of Christianity, and for the good of mankind. The profits of the Church invite all sorts of people into it, and those most, who are most attached to gain; while its doors, nay, its windows, stand open to all intruders: and those who are too filthy to be let in, either at the doors or windows, creep in thro' the sinks, and place themselves, with all their pollutions about them, at the altar. These worthy asserters of Christianity, being placed in a strong light, and a most conspicuous point of view, by their scandalous behaviour, furnish

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(*a*) Ind. Whig, V. 3. p. 226. *Peele's* edit. printed in 1735.

the enemies of religion, who desire no better, with strong arguments against it ; and, being placed so near it, the shots that are made at them, which are always sent home with good will, pass quite thro', and wound religion. Don't Laymen make the Bishops and Deans, with a prodigious number of the lower Clergy ? And they, we know, are swayed, in respect to the promotions they make, wholly by interest, or recommendation. I should rather have said, the Laity make all the Clergy ; for they make those, who make the rest ; and, considering that they choose them out of their own uncorrupt and virtuous body, it is strange they do not fill the church with better men ; and stranger still, to hear them so severe in their censures of a Clergy, chosen out of, and constituted by, themselves. One indifferent Clergyman, having got into the Church, pulls in another ; and the very men, who themselves led in the first of the uncouth train, are among the foremost to vilify religion, because the Parsons, of their own introducing, do not cease intirely to be Laymen, in the very porch of the Church. The Lay patrons, who have the disposal of many benefices, too often sell them to the vilest of men, whose consciences are wide enough to swallow the oath against simony ; or give them sometimes to undeserving relations, or servile chaplains, who have made their court by cooking religion to the squeamish palates of their masters ; and, when they have done, rail at the vices of the Clergy, and charge them upon Christianity, as if they were so many proofs of its imposture. If these things were seriously considered, it would almost seem a miracle, that the Clergy are not more corrupt and unworthy : yet I will be bold to say, they are as much superior to the Laity, in piety and virtue, at this day, as they were in the first and purest ages of Christianity. If the Clergy are fallen greatly from their former height of fidelity and purity, as indeed they are ; it must be owned, the Laity have fallen still lower in proportion, and left the same, if not a greater, distance between them and their Clergy, in point of goodness, than in any former age of the Church.

*Dech.* But the Clergy, instead of growing worse, as we do, ought to grow better: for the blinder and weaker the traveller is, the greater need he hath of a faithful and able guide. Notwithstanding this, the present age is so unhappy, as to depend on guides, who know less of the way to heaven, than those they pretend to lead; and are less able to endure the fatigues of the journey. I must own, they know more of Christianity, than others; but as they practise less of it, what are we to conclude, but that, by their greater insight into it, they have found out its weak side?

*Shep.* If there are people so weak as to make the good or evil behaviour of the Clergy their chief argument for or against religion, they would do well to examine that behaviour with the utmost attention and candour; they ought by no means to entertain either a good or bad opinion of the Clergy, as they do of other people, from favour or aversion, upon slight surmises, or casual reports. One of these weak people should ask himself, Whether his ill opinion of the Clergy arises from within himself, or the report of others? If the former, he should next consider, whether he actually knows such Clergymen to be ill livers; and, if he does, whether it follows, that all the rest are as bad as those of his acquaintance. But, if his ill opinion be founded only on appearances and surmises, he should look well, that he have no temptation from within himself to think ill of the Clergy: for, should he have any private cause to hate them; should he, for instance, grudge them their dues, or have had a quarrel with some of them; this might make them much worse men, in his opinion, than they really are; and his ill-grounded spite might render him an apostate to a true religion. But, should his disrelish to religion make him think the demands of the Clergy unreasonable, and should that opinion render the persons of the Clergy odious to him, and, by that means, increase his distrust of religion, as it so often does; he should consider how miserably his mind imposes on itself, by suggesting only a part of this fallacious circle at once; which, could he comprehend it all together, he might easily see both its deceitful nature,



ture, and dangerous tendency. If, on the other hand, his ill opinion of the Clergy is founded only on common fame, he ought to consider how unsound a bottom this is for principles of any consequence. The pride, ill-nature, and envy, of mankind, are apt to make them speak hardly of one another, and that without a strict regard to truth: the Clergy, of all men, are treated with the least ceremony, by common fame: more is expected from them than other men, and more, indeed, than man is able to perform. Nobody is afraid of being called to account for what he says of men in gowns; and therefore is less tender of their characters, than he is in relation to the characters of other men, who have swords to defend their reputations. There is no room for a middle character in a Clergyman. If he is not a Saint, he is a Devil. If he neglects his duty, he is deservedly despised as a drone, that will eat, but not work; if he is strict in the performance of it, he is impertinent with one, troublesome to another, and assuming, in the esteem of most people: if he courts and cultivates the great ones, he is a time-server, and a parasite; if he freely reproves their vices, if he arraigns them before their own consciences in private, or publicly before the world, he is impudent, malicious, and slanderous: he is a mere bully in a gown, who vents his private resentments under the protection of his office, and a pretence of zeal for his duty: if, for fear of offending, he preaches in a distant and general way, he is despised as a coward, or one who regards his own safety more than God and religion. If he, in any measure, depends for his bread on the good-will of his people, the beggar cannot speak freely to the giver, without offending him, and starving himself: if he is supported by a legal income, and pretends to exact his right, as Laymen do theirs, by law; he is a covetous and litigious oppressor, a sort of sturdy beggar, who sues people for their alms. To minds prepared by these, and such-like considerations, to think ill of the Clergy, a small fault, or the appearance of a great one, is extremely agreeable: it furnishes them with a pretence for ill-treatment, and subtraction of dues; is blown as far as the strong breath of envy and calumny

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can carry it; and is made a reason, in distant places, for distressing the Parson. Now the Clergy of our Church suffer more by calumny, than those of any other Church: the Papists know the Church of *England* to be the bulwark of the reformation, and therefore level all their spleen against its Clergy: the Deists know, that Christianity depends on instruction; and therefore propagate a thousand ill stories, no matter whether true, or false, of its teachers; and point them all as arguments against religion itself: the Dissenters have no other way of raising themselves, but by pulling us down; and this brings them into the cry against us: the Gentlemen of estates look with a wishful eye upon the tythes; and the common people, vainly imagining that, if the Clergy were deprived of all right to the tenth of their labour and increase, they would get them to themselves, join in representing them as the worst of men, in hopes that a general odium may at length grow into an act of parliament to exempt them from the claims of the Clergy.

*Temp.* I must own, there is a great deal of truth in your observations on this subject; and surely it concerns you all to have them perpetually before your eyes.

*Shep.* It would require a most diligent and exemplary Clergy to weather such a storm, pouring from all sides on the Church, and beating against religion itself: yet our Clergy, generally speaking, take no more care about this matter, than if they had neither enemies from without, intent and preparing to strike at them; nor weaknesses within, to render them vulnerable. The most sorry sort of men are admitted to holy orders, and even sometimes promoted to the highest places of trust. Nor is the error only in the first concoction: as promotion follows interest, as in respect to the worldly views of a young Clergyman, it is all one to him whether he be diligent or idle in his business, sober or loose in his behaviour, so he hath no discipline (at so low an ebb is ecclesiastical jurisdiction) to stand in awe of. Suspensions, censures, deprivations, degradations, &c. as if there were no occasion for them, are almost wholly

laid aside: so while neither faithful services are rewarded, nor neglects and scandals punished, it is no wonder if there are many unsound members in the ministry, for its enemies to lay their teeth on, for men of wit to make a jest of, and for men of art to set up as representatives for the whole order, and as arguments to silly people against religion. Even honest and well-meaning persons, who are sorry to see religion so shamefully betrayed by those whom it supports, are carried away with the general voice, and the loud clamour, to fix their eyes on the monstrous characters of our order, and to overlook those shining ones that appeared as great lights to the last generation, and those thro' which the brightness of the Gospel breaks out with glorious lustre on the present. It is very hard, that the virtues of good Clergymen shall be allowed to reflect no honour on their order, while the vices of the bad bring an odium on the whole, and even suspicion on religion. Let the candid part of the world judge, from what hath been said, whether all the ill things, reported in the present times of our Clergy, are likely to be true; nay, whether the most of them are not to be suspected of falshood, and ascribed to the ill temper, and libertine disposition, of the age. Let them seriously consider whether an ordinary Clergyman would not, with the same behaviour, make a good Layman, or 'Squire. Let all those Clergymen, Mr. *Dechaine*, be assembled, who are on a level, in rank and fortune, with the generality of the *Quorum*. Go to this assembly; shut your eyes——

*Dech.* Yes; that you all require of us, as often as we have occasion to interfere with you.

*Shep.* Well; but shut your eyes, as I said, lay your hand, at random, upon the first Clergyman you meet, and take off his gown.

*Dech.* Right; I am confident he will deserve it.

*Shep.* You are so keen! dress him in a lay-habit, and give him a temporal fortune, equal to the income he had in the Church; and suppose him to live, now he is a 'Squire, exactly, in all respects, as he did when a Parson; would he not be remarkable, among Laymen of the same rank,

rank, for a sober, regular, and, at worst, decent behaviour? His not swearing, his not wenching, his not getting drunk, his not fighting, his not jobbing in county-affairs, nor trafficking in perjuries, on the one hand; and, on the other, his charity shewn in money to the poor, and good advice to the ignorant; his honesty in all sorts of dealings, his punctual payment of debts, his humanity to his servants and other dependents, and his regular attendance on the duties and ordinances of religion; would make him a very singular sort of a 'Squire, and go fair, I am afraid (pardon my vanity), to render him the butt and laughing-stock of all the other 'Squires, as often as ever he met them, either at the assizes or sessions.

*Dech.* And pray, Sir, Do you think it sufficient for a Clergyman to be merely decent and legal in his outward behaviour? Is it enough for him to be but one small degree better than the generality of Laymen?

*Shep.* By no means: but, all things considered, I think it wonderful the Clergy are not worse than they are; nay, that they are not as bad as they are represented. Altho' there are many good and conscientious men among them, yet it cannot be denied, that there are also many, of whom, to the concern of all good Christians, it may be truly said, that they are, as you intimate, but one degree better than the Laity. They abstain, indeed, from greater crimes, and behave with a decency and reserve, not common among their lay-brethren; but this is only a small part of what their important function requires of them: a bare neglect, which in other posts would be but a *peccadillo*, is in theirs a crime. Great knowlege, and strength of reason, are necessary to the defence of a religion, so artfully attacked; great industry in spreading its principles, among an ignorant and inattentive people; great resolution in rebuking the infidelity or wickedness of those who call themselves the better sort of people; great charity and tenderness, when the wants of the poor are to be inquired into, and provided for; great virtue, and prudence of conduct, when every slip is sufficient to make an infidel or two, even among people who pretend most to a fair inquiry into the merits  
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of Christianity. It is not bare decency, and mere honesty, that will discharge this sacred and weighty duty. A zeal for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, should warm the heart; and a contempt for the world raise it above the many difficulties that clog the discharge of a Parson's duty, and frighten worldly and dastardly minds from the performance of it. Such spirits as this, God be thanked for it, we have still among us, altho', I am sorry to say, we cannot furnish out a very long list of them: but all this is needless talk; for be the professors of religion, whether Lay or Clerical, what they will, religion, in itself, is neither the better, nor the worse, for their virtues or vices.

*Dech.* You must pardon me, Sir; a religion, that does not mend the lives of its professors, is not worth the supporting; and therefore, I am sure, it is as little deserving of belief and credit. For how can we suppose a set of notions to come from God, that are of no use to man? Now, if my observation fail me not, Christianity is not only useless, but many ways prejudicial, to the world, as I have already shewn.

*Shp.* Suppose the Clergy as bad as human infirmity can render them, or spleen and malice represent them; yet this can in no sort affect the credit of religion, with sensible and candid judges, who know that the truth or falshood of religion is internal, and independent on the good or bad lives of its preachers. *Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Toland, Tindal*, and the authors of the *Independent Whig*, who, with an infinite degree of spleen and malice, laboured to represent the Clergy as the worst of men, and then employed the hideous picture, which their own prejudices had drawn for them, as if it were an argument against Christianity; at the time they did it, knew full well, that the ill behaviour of the Clergy was no proof of unsoundness in our religion, altho' they, as well as smaller Libertines, might have been, at first, tempted to infidel suspicions by that very means; but afterwards, upon furnishing themselves with what they took for better arguments, they still thought that which had introduced their minds to a most agreeable species of liberty, might be of yet greater force to effect the same in weaker understandings,

derstandings, who might take it for a real argument. It is for this reason, that all those honest Gentlemen, and all their party, have ever been careful to push home this fallacious, but popular argument, in the mask of a mere invective, as their most deadly weapon. Pray, Mr. *Dechaine*, does the bad life of a Clergyman really prove his religion to be false, in your opinion?

*Dech.* It really does.

*Shep.* Surely, then, the good life of another must prove it to be true?

*Dech.* Not at all, Sir; the case is very different. A man may be good, from a mistaken and enthusiastic principle.

*Shep.* And may he not be bad, upon mistaken principles, too? Error, I should think, is more favourable to vice, than to virtue. You set out with saying, we are to judge of mens principles by their actions. If, upon that maxim, a bad man's actions prove his principles to be bad, the virtue of a good man must, for the same reason, convince us, that his principles are good: nay, the proof, in the latter case, seems to be much stronger than in the former; for bad men may, in obedience to passion, act directly against their real principles; whereas good men, in doing well, have their passions to oppose, and therefore can act on nothing else but principle. Your way of arguing is big with contradictions, and proves our religion to be both true, and false: and as all men do sometimes good, and sometimes bad actions, it proves every professor of Christianity to be both a firm believer, and an absolute infidel. But it is no matter to any man, what the opinions and tenets of another may be, or whether he believes what he professes, or not: it is not upon such sandy foundations, as either the apparent or real notions of others, that we are to build our sentiments, in a matter of the greatest consequence. If the Clergy were all good, this, alone, would not prove their principles to be true; nor, altho' they were all bad, would it either prove them insincere in their professions, or their principles erroneous. It is not so we examine any other branch of knowlege: the intemperance of a physician does not hinder us from conforming to the regimen he prescribes

prescribes us, for the recovery of our health, provided his prescription appears, in itself, conducive to that useful end. We do not call the justice of the law in question, merely because we see a Lawyer, who makes a fortune by it, transgressing it in many instances. This whole argument is founded on too high a respect for the Clergy. You do not consider them as weak and fallible men, who, near as they lie to the fountain of Christian light, may really be blind as to its truth and excellence; and, good and firm as their principles may be, may nevertheless be often led aside by the corruptions of a frail and untoward nature, to actions which those principles severely condemn. In consequence of this slavish prepossession, you wretchedly compliment them with an imitation of all their faults, which greatly outdoes the original. Deism is but the spurious spawn of the Clerical vices. Were the Clergy such men as they ought to be, there would be few Deists in the world. But I confess they are not; and it is no wonder, considering the circumstances the Church is in.

*Dech.* Spleen! spleen! You are not promoted, and therefore all goes wrong; whereas, were you in an higher station, we presume you would be a strict conformist to the general practice, and contribute as much to the propagation of Deism, as another.

*Shep.* It is possible I might; and that may be the reason why God, who sees not only what men are, but what they would be, in case their circumstances were much altered, in compassion to me and others, keeps me where I am. Be this as it will, I must insist on it, that, were it not for our great defects, as well as your own dispositions to a loose and vicious life, you would all be Christians, altho' perhaps no Saints: all your other ingenious arguments against Christianity would fly before a virtuous Clergy, and hide themselves in silence. The darkest and most abject bigot to the Clergy, only takes up principles on their recommendation, which they sometimes contradict in their actions. But then he hath sense enough to see, that those principles are conducive to his real happiness. The Deist, on the other hand, infinitely more blind and slavish than he, thinking the Parson can neither  
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be mistaken in principle nor practice, plus his faith, his stupid negative faith, on the mere exterior conduct of a Parson: and tho' he hates and despises him, as an impudent sponge upon religion, and a traitor between God and man; yet he so admires his understanding, and thinks him so deep in the secret of imposture, that he may be safe enough in following where-ever he goes, tho' the poor man is conscious all the time, that he is going headlong to destruction. But he, who is capable of being deceived in this pitiful manner (and the great reasoners, the free-thinkers, the thinkers for themselves of these times, are all so) desires to be deceived; for no man would follow such a guide, and in such a path, that was not in great distress for delusion, that might not truly say, "I loath virtue, I love vice, I dread the judgments of God; come hither somebody, and deceive me." There are many men, who take holy orders for bread, or in obedience to their parents, or because they are unfit for any other employment, with no one qualification for the office, but the mere faith of a Christian. As their reason is seized by faith, so are their wills, on the other hand, by worldly affections, or wicked habits; and as the latter command the principle of action, the former is kept down, and lies dormant in such a manner, that its very being becomes doubtful. Thousands of Laymen have experienced this in themselves; and those who are so ready to suspect the faith, on account of the immoralities committed by Clergymen, would do well to recollect the many instances of crimes swallowed by themselves, against faith, knowledge, and the checks of conscience, or, if they be libertines, against the clear light of natural religion and law.

*Dech.* Were a Clergyman really a Christian, I cannot conceive how he should come to be vicious or profane in his conduct. A person set apart, in the most solemn manner, to be both a guide and an instructor to others, who is every day preaching, praying, and handling the holy mysteries; who knows his conduct, if only indecent, not to say wicked, must be highly prejudicial to religion, and the souls of his flock; cannot be a profligate, without being an Atheist.

*Shep.*



*Shep.* If by a profligate you mean one guilty of the most scandalous vices, I don't know but your observation may be just. But if you understand by the word, no more than such an idle and loose behaviour, as passes without much censure in a layman, I believe a Clergyman, who leads such a life, may nevertheless be a Christian, merely in point of historical faith. If a man goes into orders, with no higher degree of faith than this, chiefly for the sake of bread or preferment, I cannot see how we can expect a much more Christian life and conversation from him than from another, no better principled, who is still a Layman. To expect an extraordinary degree of virtue from a man, after going into orders, who made but a sorry sort of a Christian before it, shews but too great a reverence for the spiritual power of a Bishop, and the laying on of hands. But mighty expectations from the efficacy of religious ordinances are often pretended by Libertines, that the real effects may seem the less. As the purest stream must become foul, if it falls into a quagmire, so the most excellent religion, falling into a degenerate age, and passing thro' corrupt and sacrilegious hands to a loose and dissolute people, must undergo appearances extremely different from those in which its true genius would shew itself, were it duly pressed home, by a diligent and exemplary ministry, on a well-disposed and reclaimable people. Pray, Gentlemen, do you think it impossible for a man, on any occasion, to act against his principles?

*Dech.* No; but I think, the general tenor of a man's actions must shew his principles, or nothing can.

*Shep.* This rule does not hold. There are men, whose general conduct runs directly against reason and conscience; yet we cannot say they are wholly void of reason, nor perhaps intirely free from compunction. It is not easy for those, who are continually wielding the unanswerable arguments for our religion, to doubt of its truth; but many of them have a sufficient latitude of mind to make room for that, and at the same time for loose desires, and worldly affections, without much hazard of their interfering. They can afford a distinct chamber to each, and quarter them at such a distance, that

that faith shall seldom reprove vice, or vice disgust faith. Their minds, divided by many partitions, may compliment religion with the assent, as with the state-apartment; while other lodgings, more convenient for action, and more in the way of business, are assigned to avarice, ambition, or pleasure. The mind of the plain man is more simple, and less capacious; and therefore his faith, his will, his desires, are all entertained together in one room, where, having an opportunity to incorporate, and growing into a singleness of heart, they become one uniform spring of action.

*Dech.* This allegorical way of accounting for the consistency of good principles with bad actions in the same man, is a little too intricate and laboured. It is much easier to conceive, that the ill life of a Clergyman is owing to his contempt of natural religion, and his distrust of the revealed.

*Shep.* Such a conception may, I own, be very easy to one, who is determined to consider nothing in a bad Clergyman, but his bad actions, and will give no attention, either to the better part of his behaviour, or to his death-bed remorse. Allowing, however, that such a person hath no principles, it cannot be inferred from thence, that Christianity is destitute of sufficient evidence, since ignorance, inattention, or corrupt affections, may render a Clergyman as incompetent a judge of that evidence as any other man. Our religion, considered in itself, must have an inherent truth or falshood of its own, which neither the virtue nor immorality of its preachers can change. Nor can their belief, any more than their practice, add any thing to its real truth, or even its external evidence. It may be false, tho' they believe it. It may be true, tho' they should distrust it. It must be either the one or the other, independent of their sentiments about it. The Clergy, in these remote ages from the promulgation of the Gospel, are no witnesses to its truth, which was sufficiently attested by its first preachers, who saw the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, and vouched for them by the greatest virtue, and with their blood. Shall then the ill lives, or the supposed infidelity, of some among its present preachers, prove

prove that religion to be false 1700 years after its introduction into the world, which the strict virtue and heroic deaths of so many Lay as well as Clerical martyrs, who lived and died for the faith, proved to be true, at the only time when it was possible to prove it either true or false? It cannot be said, either that the miracles, by which it was proved to the Apostolical age, were done in a corner, or that the records, by which that proof is handed down to later ages, are concealed by the Clergy. You, Gentlemen, have as free access to them as we; and can, as easily, examine whether they are authentic and sufficient.

*Dech.* Well; but have not the Clergy more leisure, and better opportunities of knowing, whether the religion they preach be true or false, than other people? Are we not therefore to lay a greater stress on their inquiries than our own? And how are we to guess at the secret result of that inquiry, but by their lives, which, to common sense and reason, speak out their real sentiments of the matter much more plainly, than their preaching?

*Shep.* It is very certain, that the Clergy, generally speaking, are much better qualified for the search of religious truths, than their Lay brethren. Yet, as those who bear hardest on the Clergy, and are most apt to disbelieve the Christian religion, have fortunes that afford them education, leisure, and books, it is a shame to hear them say, they form their sentiments, and govern their lives, by the scandalous behaviour of two or three sorry Parsons. Is it thus they disdain authorities, explode musty opinions, beat out new paths, and think freely for themselves? What is it to them, whether opinions are held by others or not; or whether the multitude be with them, or against them? Their piercing eyes can look thro' the ambiguous merits of the most controverted point. Surely understandings like theirs cannot be tempted in the least to doubt of Christianity, because a Parson, so infinitely beneath them in every respect, lives as if he did not believe it. Nay, would it not be a sufficient obstacle to their believing in it at all, if they thought such a wretch had taken the way of them in the faith? But if the vices of one Clergyman can turn a man of this stamp into an Infidel, why should not the virtues of

of

of another convert him again? Or, if the degeneracy of the Clergy, in this age and country, is capable of driving him from religion, it is but reasonable, that the exemplary lives of that Order, in another, should bring him back. Why shall not the good Parsons have their stroke at the shuttlecock, as well as the bad ones? But I fear it would be to little purpose. The good Parsons, indeed, may strike, and strike with a force not to be resisted by reason; but what will this avail, since the bad, being seconded by all his passions and desires, may easily drive him down the wind of his own prejudices against the virtues of ten thousand Saints and Martyrs? As you, Mr. *Dechaine*, are sufficiently furnished for a fair inquiry into Christianity; and as it is a matter of some importance to you; why should you not look into it yourself? Ought you not to have good reason for rejecting it, and not poorly depend on examples, which you may mistake, which, altho' they were worse than your opinion of them, could neither prove that those who set them are Infidels, nor that, if they are, you ought to be an Infidel too? You don't act so weakly in other things. It is no argument with you, that money is of no value, because you see another idly squander it away. No, you judge for yourself, and esteem it according to your own experience of its use, tho' perhaps there does not go quite as much of it thro' your hands, as thro' those of your prodigal neighbour. Is it not strange the Clergy should have such credit with you, as men of deep penetration, that some among them cannot be idle or wicked, but you must immediately conclude Christianity to be an imposture? Let me advise you, Mr. *Dechaine*, to lessen your respect for the Clergy, for I see you are still an errant bigot to them. Let me beseech you candidly to examine, and, if you find reason for so doing, openly to reverence, the religion they preach, notwithstanding the contempt that may be due to their persons. Do and say as the people did, who fell down before the ass that carried the image of *Isis*, *Non tibi, sed religioni.*

*Dech.* No, Parson; the asses shall never see me on my knees before them, either out of respect to them, or their burden. All you have said, ~~Sir~~, and ten thousand times more,



more, will not be sufficient to convince me, that the ill lives of you Clergy is not a demonstration against the truth of your religion. Words can never preponderate, when actions are placed in the opposite scale. Your harangues pass for no more with me, than those of a Mountebank, who once advised me to buy his ointment for sore eyes, when his own eyes were in a worse condition than mine. No spiritual Quack, Mr. *Shepherd*, shall have leave to tamper with the eyes of my understanding, till I see the success of his skill and medicines on the distempers of his own, and of his heart. His vices will ever prove him a cheat to my judgment, and demonstrate all his fine talk to be mere cosenage and priestcraft.

*Shep.* I cannot help that; but this I am confident of, that if the Clergy are as bad, as your opinion speaks them, it is a strong argument for the Divinity of their religion.

*Dech.* It would be a fine sophism that could prove that; but I observe, most of the arguments I have offered against your religion, are in your opinion, and by your way of turning them, intirely in its favour. If the vices of the Clergy prove the truth of Christianity, you will one of these days convert us all, and make a duty of being wicked; and the fellow, *Templeton*, who is Minister of your parish, will be a most able defender of the faith.

*Shep.* Pray, Sir, is not that cause most able to support itself, which maintains its ground with the fewest foreign aids?

*Dech.* I believe it may.

*Shep.* And if it is most powerfully and artfully opposed, at the same time that it is feebly, or hardly at all, defended, is not this a great argument of its natural strength?

*Dech.* Perhaps it is.

*Shep.* Now I insist, that if the Clergy are such as you represent them, interested, luxurious, idle, ignorant, hypocritical, &c. the cause they have in hand, since it still keeps its ground, must either be supported by an Almighty power, or by its own internal excellence and truth. A cause so artfully and so vigorously opposed,

and scandalously betrayed; a cause with bitter, and vigilant, and powerful enemies, and none but false friends; must stand upon some foundation of its own, if it stands at all. Our religion must indeed have been long ago borne down by the weight of its false and dissolute professors, were it not for a Divine strength that holds its head above water, with this mill-stone about its neck.

*Dech.* It may be strong enough, for ought I can tell; but its strength seems to be like that of a little man, whom I knew, and who could lift a thousand weight; but it was a wonder to every body where his strength lay.

*Shep.* Sir, my argument is fully answered, as all arguments must be, tho' never so serious and solid, if they can be jested with. Lord *Shaftesbury* hath laid this down for a rule, and therefore it must be so.

*Dech.* Were your religion of Divine appointment, God would either have so contrived it, as that it should have stood in no need of a Ministry, or at least, that its Ministry should have been in no danger of falling into bad hands. But I think it nonsense to say, that a true and universal religion can depend on teachers, especially such as may neglect their duty, and by their ill behaviour bring its truth in question, say it were even among ignorant people only.

*Shep.* Some true religion there must be, and there can be but one. This religion must be fitted to the wants of all men, and ought to be universal. Now amongst all the religions hitherto known or heard of, there never was one which did not require to be taught and learned. Your religion, you say, is that of nature, and universally known without teaching. Yet the world hath been always trusting to real or pretended revelations, and knew nothing of an untaught religion, till about a century ago, that some Deists began to set up a new one, which, if we believe themselves, needed not to have been taught, because every body knew it before. Altho', however, mankind wanted only to be reminded of this internal religion, its Apostles have not been able to make us sensible we have any such thing within us. They tell us there is no need of being taught it, since the light of nature

nature hath done that already, without trouble or charges : but they refute themselves in the very telling ; for, if we had such a natural and spontaneous religion within us, there would be no occasion for their putting us in mind of it, nature itself doing that for us, as well as for them.

*Dech.* You will not suffer nature to do any thing for you, or at least for those, who will listen to you. The internal senses must be suppressed, and reason vilified, that your artificial lights may seem necessary, and be taken off your hands at the greater price.

*Shep.* And you, to save expences, which is just as selfish in you, as the desire of a maintenance is in us, run down the light of revelation, and prove it useless by no other argument, but an assertion, that nature is a sufficient instructor ; and this experience contradicts. As to our suppressing the internal sense, or the light of nature, I deny both the attempt, and, upon your own principles, the possibility of the fact. We insist on, and argue from nature, as far as she lends us any assistance ; and if her light were so universally clear and strong, as you represent it, no endeavours of ours could ever extinguish it, and those least of all, that fall in with it, and inculcate a system of principles, most agreeable to nature. If the light of nature cannot be extinguished, why, in the name of wonder, am I to be taught that, which the teacher tells me I know already ? The teachers of Christianity act a more consistent part ; for, as to that religion, they acknowledge it absolutely necessary somebody should teach it, in order to our knowing any thing of it. It is also necessary there should be some people to administer its sacraments to us ; for we have no right to take the gifts of God in any way, but that by which he hath thought proper to hand them to us. Now he did not think fit to do this by a ministry of Angels ; but chose, for reasons which he was not obliged to assign us, to give us men like ourselves for ministers ; who, altho' they may err like other men, have it not in their power to change the nature, or lessen the authority, or render of no effect the ordinances, of our religion. The knowledge of some religion being absolutely necessary to us, and there being

no religion, which teaches itself, we ought to have instructors, set apart from other employments, to take care of us in a matter of so great concern. Were there no set of men, whose peculiar business and duty it is to study, to transcribe, to translate the Scriptures, and often to call us from our worldly affairs to hear the word and will of God, that word would, in a little time, become useless and unknown; and religion, running in the foul chanel of oral tradition only, would undergo great alterations and corruptions from the inventions of men, which you affect to dignify with the title of the natural light. The teachers of our religion have this great advantage over those of yours, that they can prove, or can say at least, that they are sent and empowered by God to teach; whereas yours cannot even say they are either sent or authorized by him, since they maintain, the principles they teach are universally known already, and taught by nature herself.

*Dechaine.* ENOUGH, I think, hath been said to support the last article of our creed, by which we anathematize all revelations. I have allowed you a full scope to declaim; for your right to a livelihood was at stake. But your laboured apology, which, I perceive, hath had an unaccountable effect on Mr. *Templeton*, was far enough from making any impression on me, and perhaps as far from satisfying yourself. Every objection I have made to your religion, was sufficient to shake its very foundations, altho' no other had been urged; but all united, and built on the arguments for the light of nature, which prove a revelation needless, they amount to a demonstration subversive of revealed religion. This, *Shepherd*, you are, I verily believe, as sensible of, as I am; but you will not own it, for reasons already intimated.

*Shep.* I do confess, Sir, a pound of feathers is as heavy as a pound of lead. But you must excuse me, if I tell you, that I dare not take your feathers off your hands, at the weight you say they amount to in your demonstration-scales. If no single objection is sufficient to make me renounce my religion, the union of ten thousand such



will not impart a demonstrative force to any one of them; and therefore, all put together, they will not be able to convince me, or any other reasonable man. You may make a *French* triumph after every battle, go it as it will; and I, for my part, who did not dispute for victory, will sing no *Te Deums*. But there is one thing worth telling you, which I believe you had no notion of.

*Dech.* Well now, what is that?

*Shep.* You have been, during all our conferences, disputing most strenuously for the Christian religion.

*Dech.* How say you! for Christianity! Have I been all along disputing for Christianity, *Templeton*?

*Temp.* I thought not.

*Shep.* You have offered a noble proof in its favour; and you, Mr. *Cunningham*, will, I am sure, take it as a compliment from me, if I say you have helped your friend to make this proof a little stronger than otherwise it would have been. The immediate followers of our Blessed Saviour saw numberless miracles wrought in confirmation of their faith, from whence they derived this advantage, that they trusted to their own eyes, and not to the report of others. But to make us, who depend chiefly on the most authentic reports, some amends, other proofs for the truth of our religion are afforded us, which the first Christians had the benefit of only in part, and which bring our faith up almost to an equal certainty with theirs. Our Saviour foretold the bloody persecutions which his Disciples were to undergo in after-times; and he likewise prophesied of the prodigious progress his Gospel was to make among mankind. No mere strength of conjecture could have enabled him to foresee these strange and improbable events; and those who did not long outstay him in the world, could receive no full proof in favour of his Mission, from the completion of these prophecies, which were not intirely fulfilled till several ages after their deaths. But they, as well as that concerning the destruction of *Jerusalem*, have since been verified by events, which they fit as exactly, as if they had been wrote immediately after those events. This sort of proof adds prodigiously to the grounds of our faith; and, while there are so many Christians in the world,

world, we, by means of the prophecy concerning the progress of the Gospel, afford one another every day a demonstration of its truth.

*Dech.* I cannot see how this proves I have been all day arguing for Christianity.

*Shep.* I shall not long keep your curiosity upon the stretch. Christ foretold, that the *Jews* should suffer great tribulation, such as never happened from the beginning of the world to that time; that they should be led captives into all nations; and that *their city should be trodden down of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled.* St. Paul, pursuing the same prophecy, says, *Blindness hath in part happened to the Jews, till the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in; and then all Israel shall be saved;* intimating, that the dispersion and obstinate infidelity of the *Jews* were great promoters of the conversion and faith of other nations. This prophecy hath been verified by a fact, visible to all the world, in every age since it was uttered. *Jerusalem* was trodden down; the *Jews* have been led captives into all nations; blindness in part hath happened to them, for they have always retained the worship of the true God, but have rejected Christianity; *their casting away hath proved the reconciling of the world, and their diminishing, the riches of the Gentiles;* for to this day they every-where verify this prophecy, than which nothing can speak more strongly for the truth of our religion, not even excepting the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning our Saviour, which those very *Jews*, averse as they are to Christianity, preserve genuine, and explain or translate over the whole world to all, who have any curiosity to hear what their sacred books contain.

*Dech.* How well he proves me a strenuous defender of Christianity!

*Shep.* This prophecy concerning the *Jews* hath so great analogy to that in which St. Paul and St. Peter speak of you, that I could not help introducing the one by the other.

*Dech.* Of me!

*Shep.* Yes, Sir, of you, and all our other Libertines. Our Saviour foretold, that *false prophets*, which signify

the same as false teachers, *should arise*; and St. Paul prophesied, that *the time should come, when men would not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears.* St. Peter gives a prophetic character of the teachers, who, by their novel and seducing doctrines, were to rub the uneasy itching ears of the aforesaid hearers. *There shall be false teachers among you, says he, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them; and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of; they through covetousness shall with feigned words make merchandize of you. Presumptuous are they, self-willed; they speak of the things they understand not, beguiling unstable souls, who have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Boser. They are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest, who, when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh.* To finish this prophetic picture, and give it the last heightening touch, after which it cannot fail to strike, he says, *There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.* This prophecy hath this day been literally fulfilled. The time is come, when men cannot endure sound doctrine, but run from Teacher to Teacher, till they can light upon some one, who will entertain them with new notions and doctrines, pleasing to their lusts; some one, who can assuage their just apprehensions of a future reckoning, and give them a sort of licence from God to live as their nature dictates, that is, as they please. People, who know so well what they would be taught, can easily, in an age and country so luxuriant in novelties and refinements, accommodate themselves with Teachers, who *privily* steal into their minds those *damnable heresies*, which both the Teacher, and the Taught, are ashamed openly to own; who teach them *to deny the Lord that bought them*; who profelyte them to the *broad way*, and fill their mouths with bitter scurrilities against *the way of truth*; who impose upon them with double expressions, and feigned words, till they have insinuated the first principles, from whence their doctrines, which would have shocked,

shocked, had they been proposed all at once and openly, are by degrees to be sily deduced, and the whole mystery of iniquity unfolded, leaf by leaf, as their poor deluded Disciples can conquer the misgivings of their consciences. Never were Teachers more exactly characterized. *Presumptuous are they, self-willed.* Here the conceited self-sufficient doctrine, that sends us to ourselves for our laws, that would have us think our understandings well enough enlightened, without any instruction, and turns us loose to the dictates of our own wills, is strongly and plainly pointed at. The peculiar turn of our Libertines in railing and gibing, instead of arguing, on points which they will not be at the trouble of considering, is closely and literally expressed, by *speaking evil of things they understand not.* Their getting in with young raw Gentlemen, who are yet unfixed in principles; and prone to loose pleasures, is as properly set before our eyes, as words can do it, by the expression, *Beguiling unstable souls.* Their being compared to *Balaam*, who spoke in the name of God, but had his thoughts intent on gain, carries a very strong allusion in it to a set of men, who, for mere worldly profits and pleasures, to rid themselves of religious restraints and tithes, turn the light of that knowlege they have received from revelation against it, and fight it with its own weapons. They are each of them, if we believe themselves, a living fountain of religious knowlege, that borrows its waters from no other source or stream, as having plenty of living and native waters springing perpetually from within itself but when we go to draw from these fountains, we find *they are wells without water*, as *St. Peter* calls them. It is hardly possible to figure to us a dark and whiffing mind, driven here and there by every gust of appetite and passion, which is, I think, a notorious part of the Libertine character, better than by *a cloud carried by a tempest.* And, to complete the whole, if they happen to be engaged with any one in a dispute about religion, the sole tendency of their arguments, if it is seen thro', appears to be nothing else, than an endeavour to justify themselves in *following their own lusts*, and to draw others into a course of life like their own. As arguments



for such a purpose are not to be had in sufficient plenty, a supercilious look, a contemptuous grin, ill-natured ridicule, and profane ribaldry, serve these *scoffers* as well, or better, than arguments; for the persons they choose to make their attacks on, are more apt to be affected with a jest, than a reason.

*Temp.* You forget one circumstance, that seems, more especially, to point this part of the prophecy at the present times; and that is, the having erected *ridicule* into a criterion for the deciding of all disputes, particularly those that relate to religion, morality, and politics.

*Dech.* Nay, if the prophecy looks so directly this way, there's an end of the world; for it says expressly, that these *scoffers* shall come in the last days. Be so good, Mr. *Templeton*, to let me know, whether the grand assizes are to be held on *Saturday* or *Sunday* next.

*Shep.* The prophecy would lose a considerable argument of its truth, if you did not make a jest of it.

*Temp.* I protest, Mr. *Dechaine*, it is not a little strange, that, after fair warning, you should compliment St. *Peter* with such a testimony.

*Shep.* Not to detain you any longer on this prophecy, I shall conclude with one remark more: whether the Gentlemen, pointed out by it, are victors, or vanquished, in any dispute about religion, they always make a formal triumph on the spot, and brag where-ever they go, how cleverly they refuted, and how unmercifully they mauled, the adversary. But I should have expressed it better, if I had used St. *Peter's* way of describing it, by *Speaking great swelling words of vanity*. Thus, Sir, I think it is plain, you have been for many hours employed in a practical defence of our religion, and stooping under the cross of Christ.

*Dech.* I understand you very well, Sir, and your prophetic ill-manners. Now that we are at the close of all our silly conferences, pray, Mr. *Shepherd*, do you not think I have had a world of patience? Bless us! what a mass of stuff have I been listening to, for I know not how many days! I never did, and, I promise you, never will again, drudge in such a heap of rubbish.

*Shep.* I own your patience, which is very delicate on the side towards religion, hath undergone some trials. I wish, however, it could hold out for another day; for as you have taken unbounded liberties with us Parsons, and on many occasions severely flouted at our sermons, it would be but just to allow me the same privilege of censuring the Apostles of Libertinism, and their performances.

*Cunn.* You had as good let them alone.

*Temp.* I think Mr. *Shepherd*, after what hath passed to-day, hath a right to be heard on the topic he proposes for another conference.

*Dech.* All he desires is an opportunity to rail at better men than himself, and to mangle with clumsy criticisms the works of authors, who wrote with a politeness above his taste, and with a depth of reasoning beyond his understanding. A fine critic, indeed, for a Lord *Herbert*, a Lord *Shaftesbury*, an *Hobbes*, or a *Tindal*! My patience is exhausted. Adieu, Parson.

*Temp.* Mr. *Shepherd*, I hope, if I come to see you sometimes, I shan't be troublesome?

*Shep.* Sir, your visits will give me the greatest pleasure. Gentlemen, farewell.

*The End of the Seventh DIALOGUE.*



## D I A L O G U E VIII.

TEMPLETON, | SHEPHERD.

*Temp.* **B**E not surpris'd, Mr. *Shepherd*, to see me here again, and alone: the other two Gentlemen, having no stomach to any further conversation with you, did all they could to dissuade me from this visit. After having sufficiently lectured me, during a course of nine or ten years, on the necessity of opening my eyes, and thinking freely for myself, they shew, on this occasion, that all they aimed at was only to lay me open to their principles, and shut me up to those of Christianity. The end of thinking freely is, to find out truth; whereas all the use they apply it to is, to rid themselves of their old principles, and to beat out new opinions, without the least regard to the truth or falshood of either.

*Shep.* Can this be called free-thinking?

*Temp.* Not, indeed, without a great abuse of words: for a man may shew the bigot, as well by a blind attachment to new opinions, as by a stiff and senseless adherence to old ones.

*Shep.* Most surely. The mind is enslaved, when it is hindered from following reason in a search after truth. Now it may be thus enslaved, as well by vanity and corrupt passions, to new notions and inventions, as by prejudice of education, to old hereditary errors. Either way, a falshood is impos'd on it under the semblance of truth, and truth itself is kept out of sight.

*Temp.* Well, Sir, if thro' vanity, and in order to a life of sensual pleasure, I suffer'd my too easy mind to suck in loose principles, I hope I shall be forgiven, as advantage was taken of me in that stage of life, when I had strong passions, and little judgment; provided I now, in a greater maturity of reason, sincerely set myself to the pursuit of such principles as may approve them-



themselves to my unbyassed judgment, and, with a manly force of mind, reject those that have nothing more to recommend them, than their soothing the sensitive part of my nature.

*Shep.* Have you so far ejected the prejudices you lately laboured under, as to make room within you for principles that may possibly lead to self-denial?

*Temp.* I have, if I can judge of myself.

*Shep.* It is almost as difficult to judge rightly of one's self, as it is to postpone a prejudice that pleases, to a principle that restrains and mortifies.

*Temp.* The utmost I can boast of, as to that, is, a thorough diffidence of myself, and a full conviction, that I stand in equal need of instruction, in order to enlighten my reason; and of restraint, in order to subdue and govern my passions.

*Shep.* Nothing further is wanting, on your part, but to use your reason in guarding against erroneous instructions, whether from me, or any one else; and to apply to that infallible instructor, whom *Socrates* and *Plato* wished for; that gracious guide and governor, whose bridle is strong enough to restrain the brutal part of your nature, and yet too light and gentle to gall it.

*Temp.* I want and desire his assistance, as much as *Alcibiades* did.

*Shep.* That young nobleman had, for his master, the wisest Heathen that ever lived: yet you may easily judge, by his debauched and irregular life, that, notwithstanding his great talents, and many excellent qualities, the violence of his passions made something more convincing and powerful than philosophy, necessary to him.

*Temp.* Nothing can be more evident; and I, for my own part, am satisfied, that, had I been the pupil of *Socrates*, as he was, I should have gathered enough from the lessons of my master, to make me despise, and, perhaps, profane, the mysteries of *Ceres*, as he did; but not enough to find out a religion sufficiently qualified to command my respect, and make me a good man. For some years past much art hath been used to tincture me with certain fashionable opinions, to  
which,

which, till I had the happiness of your acquaintance, I was but too well inclined; you have not only shewn me the unsoundness of those opinions, but opened my eyes a little, in respect to the unfair dealing of those who have had the management of my mind. I wish you would go a little farther, and, pursuant to the intention you intimated at the close of our last conference, give me your censures on the arts and writings of our Libertine Apostles. This, I foresee, would have a good effect, and is all I can wait for now, being obliged to leave this country in a few days; but not without a scheme, which I shall mention to you before we part, for bringing us often together, or, rather, uniting my dear Mr. *Shepherd* so closely to me, that nothing but death shall be able to part us. If this pleasing intention of mine takes place, I shall have leisure to use his assistance in forming a right idea of Christianity, to which I see its author, and its nature, have made instructors, in some measure, necessary.

*Shep.* I should be the most unworthy of men, if I did not comply with any request, or enter into any justifiable scheme, for the satisfaction of a person who makes the most acceptable sacrifice to truth, and does me the honour to ask my poor assistance in offering it up. But I am afraid, the matter proposed for the subject of our present conversation is, as Mr. *Dechaine* intimated, above my capacity; besides, it opens so wide a field, in which the particulars, to be taken notice of, lie in so great confusion, that the whole day will scarcely afford time for a cursory view of it.

*Temp.* It is now but six of the clock, and I am determined to stay with you till the evening, provided you will dedicate this one day to my further satisfaction. Be assured, good Sir, it is somewhat better than a mere curiosity, that obliges me to be thus troublesome to you.

*Shep.* If our conversation may be, in the least, either entertaining or useful to you, I shall think the day, or week, that is laid out on it, a very great happiness to me.

ARE there not many things, Mr. *Templeton*, which it highly concerns us to know, of which, however, we cannot have a competent knowlege, without instruction?

*Temp.* There certainly are, not only in religious, but in other kinds of knowlege.

*Shep.* In respect to such, yet unknown, but knowable, matters, may not a man have too low an opinion of his own natural talents, so as to neglect the right use of them, and his opportunities?

*Temp.* Yes; thro' indolence, too great diffidence in himself, or attention to other things, he may overlook a branch of knowlege which well deserves his pains, and towards the acquisition of which his own reason might lend him great assistance, at least as a check on the instructions he might receive, in order to that acquisition.

*Shep.* If such an one, neglecting the means of knowlege that are placed within his reach, should give himself wholly up to the tuition and guidance of others, what would you think of him?

*Temp.* I should think such an implicit resignation might as well put him into the way of error, as of truth.

*Shep.* There are a thousand to one on the side of error: for to any branch of knowlege there is but one path of truth; whereas the by-paths of error, in respect to that branch, are various, and may be infinite. This man, then, shuts his eyes, and is led, he knows not whither.

*Temp.* His blindness is both deplorable, and culpable, in the highest degree.

*Shep.* Such is the extreme of self-diffidence. Opposite to this there is another extreme, as prejudicial to truth. Are there not some things, which, by the strength of our own natural faculties, we may arrive at the knowlege of?

*Temp.* Yes; and many more which may be known with a very little assistance.

*Shep.* What would you think of him who, finding himself, without instruction, to acquire knowlege in some things,

things, should immediately fancy himself above the necessity of an instructor in all things?

*Temp.* I should think him highly conceited.

*Shep.* And suppose, because he can make some small progress by himself, for instance, in religious knowledge, he should take it into his head to think he is arrived at the utmost limits of Theology, and that neither God nor man could carry him further; what notion would you have of him?

*Temp.* I should think him not only the most conceited, but the most presumptuous, of mankind.

*Shep.* Such a person as this, thro' an high conceit of his own abilities, and a settled contempt for the understandings of other men, will learn nothing, believe nothing, and trust to nobody but himself. It is easy to see, that, from this species of pride, nothing is to be expected but profound ignorance, gross mistakes, and a dissolute course of life. The men who fit this character, in a country of liberty, and a debauched age, form a large class; of whom a few put their talents on the rack of invention to furnish themselves with matter for shew and parade: for nothing can set off the man of parts to such advantage, as great sagacity and knowledge, displayed in new and surprising notions, which, it may be thought, he could not have borrowed, from either men or books. The rest, having no thirst of knowledge, and as little vanity, neglect the use both of their own natural talents, and of other mens instructions, and set up for free-thinkers, altho' they do not think at all. Bigots shut their eyes, in order to be led by others; but these wink, and stumble forward, feeling their way only by repeated bounces against vice, and miserable encounters with all its shocking effects.

*Temp.* If you had, at any time, made one among this sort of men, you could not, in my opinion, who know them but too well, have characterized them more exactly.

*Shep.*



*Shep.* **T**HE Spirit of *Libertinism*, being that which distinguishes the present from all former, and, it is to be hoped, will distinguish it from all future ages; it will be necessary to have a right idea of that Spirit; in order to judge, as we ought to do, of those whom it animates. The *Libertine Spirit* cannot be better defined, than by one word, to wit, *Self-sufficiency*.

*Temp.* A definition in one word!

*Shep.* If you recollect what passed in our second, third, and fourth Dialogues, you will be convinced the definition is just and full; *sufficiency* furnishing the *genus*, and *self* the *specific difference*.

*Temp.* I took notice of your using this term in our debates. Whether it contains a strict definition, or not, we need not stay to examine: but, I must confess, a whole volume, wrote on purpose to set forth the nature of *Libertinism*, could not have conveyed to us a more perfect idea of it. All its various signs, characters, modes, and effects, proceed from, and centre in, *Self-sufficiency*. It is, indeed, a self-instructing, a self-governing, and a self-pleasing Spirit. The *Libertine* hath abundant light, religion, law, and obligation, within himself: he needs no other guide, no other teacher, no other lawgiver nor governor, but himself, his own sufficient self. The knowledge of religion and morality he borrows from none, but is, in respect to both, an independent and perfect being: hence proceed his exalted notions of himself, and hence his pretensions to unbounded liberty of thought and action. Were it not blasphemy, I should wish to be a *Libertine*, who is certainly something more than a demigod. What an injury you have done me, Mr. *Shepherd*, in humbling me to Christianity!

*Shep.* Your irony hints to me the origin and progress of *Libertinism*, which it will not be amiss to take a short view of, because it will serve extremely well, to illustrate our definition.

*Temp.* I am impatient to hear it.

*Shep.* *Libertinism* is by no means a novelty. You will, perhaps, be surprised to hear me say, it is older than the world.

*Temp.*

*Temp.* Indeed!

*Shep.* It was *Self-sufficiency* made the devil aspire to independency: he thought himself too wise, too great, and glorious a being, to be any thing less than God. He said, *I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will be like the Most High.*

*Temp.* Nothing, in all revelation, seems more astonishing to me, than that an Angel, so full of wisdom, of purity, and goodness, who so well knew the infinite power of God, should, in heaven itself, become a rebel to that power.

*Shep.* Of his fall we can have only a very imperfect idea; of the fact, revelation gives us a full assurance, while moral evil and misery vouch but too plainly for its probability. Every being, subject to an excess of pride, is destitute of reason and wisdom, knows no superior, and is impatient of all controul. *Eve* was tempted to transgress the commandment of God, by the very arguments and inducements suggested in every Libertine book: the devil insinuated, that the prohibition laid on her, which was purely positive, was the effect of mere will and arbitrariness; that to eat the forbidden fruit, was really for her good; would open her eyes, she being, as yet, kept in the dark by her fear of God, that is, by her religion; would make her wise, like God, that is, knowing good and evil, of herself; and, to finish the temptation, that the fruit was good to eat, and would give her great pleasure. The devil, thro' the woman's fondness for pleasure, and curiosity, infused his own pride, and love of independency: hence it was that conceit, affectation of knowlege, and inordinate love of pleasure, became the source of all sin; and it is worth observing, that, in proportion as those dispositions render any one *self-sufficient*, they, to this day, render him also corrupt and wicked. The mother of mankind, having eat the forbidden fruit, became *self-sufficient*, and was qualified to be a teacher of *Libertinism* to her husband; upon whose compliance, he, for the first time, knew evil, so as to distinguish between that, and good, which was all he knew before. Thus it was that mankind were introduced to something more than mere moral

ral knowlege, and were made, to their cost, and in a wrong sense, *self-sufficient*. The sacrifices of *Abel* were better received than those of *Cain*: the pride of *Cain* could not brook this preference, altho' the effect of infinite wisdom; but, swelling him with *Self-sufficiency*, put him upon arraigning God of partiality, and murdering his brother. Were not *Korah*, and his company, very *self-sufficient*, when they said to *Moses* and *Aaron*, *Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation is holy, every one of them? Will ye put out the eyes of these men?* You may observe, that these persons, who spoke the very language of our present Libertines, could not be convinced, by all the wonders God had wrought for them, that others were more holy than themselves, or had any authority from God to rule over them. Our Libertines may find their picture, also, in those *Israelites* who murmured in the wilderness, and hankered after the flesh-pots of *Egypt*; who, in spite of miracles, were made unbelievers by their bellies; who placed freedom in the bondage of *Egypt*, and looked on the service of God as slavery; who preferred their own way of thinking to Divine Revelation; who thought they should have been happier, had they been allowed to think for themselves, and, as a consequence to that, to be their own directors and choosers. By their own senses and appetites, by their own reasonings, they were induced to prefer a state of slavery and gluttony, to one of self-denial and submission, and to distrust the promises of God, that this latter state should lead them to freedom and happiness. *Saul*, being made a King, was lifted up with *Self-sufficiency*, and invaded the priestly office, thinking there was no necessity, that a meaner man should come between God and him. An independent spirit was the sin of *Jeroboam*, who, rather than suffer his subjects to worship the true God at *Jerusalem*, which might have brought them again under the dominion of *David's* posterity, set up his golden calves at *Dan* and *Bethel*, and gave the *Israelites* a religion of their own. Was not this a glorious kind of *Libertinism* or *Self-sufficiency*, which turned away this usurper, and his rebellious people, from the service of the good, the Almighty,

mighty, and eternal God, to the adoration of a calf? How despicable a creature is man, when blinded by pretensions to independency! In later times the *Jews*, forsaking the simplicity of that religion God had given them, followed the various and contradictory traditions of their Rabbis, by which the commandments of God were explained away, and rendered ineffectual. Those must certainly have been very *self-sufficient* instructors, who had the boldness to make the word of God speak a language contrary to its own end and intention, because more agreeable to theirs. It was *Self-sufficiency* that dictated all the idolatry of the *Gentiles*: what an high opinion must they have of themselves, who choose or make their own gods! All their philosophy, excepting that of *Socrates* and *Plato*, who acknowledged the blindness of human nature, and the necessity of a Divine instructor, was evidently derived from the same source: for not one, but those two, founded his morality on any sense of religion, or ever dreamt of an inability in man to render himself perfect and happy.

*Temp.* This sets the errors of antiquity in a new point of light, at least to me; and, I verily believe, accounts, better than any other hypothesis, for the dogmatical industry of those who propagated them. Mere ignorance, which is only the absence of knowledge, can never be the source of wrong opinions; because it forms no opinions: and altho', by means of their ignorance, or imperfect lights, men should fall into errors; such errors could never become epidemic, without the assistance of conceit and *Self-sufficiency*.

*Shep.* Had all men, *Jew* as well as *Gentile*, in the times of our Saviour and his Apostles, been sensible of their own ignorance; would not this, think you, have procured Christianity an easier admission, in every country where it was preached?

*Temp.* Certainly.

*Shep.* Men must feel their own wants, before they will either look for, or accept of a supply. A man who thinks himself hail and sound, will laugh at the physician, who pretends to prescribe to him. It was nothing else but *Self-sufficiency* that made our religion appear  
*foolish.*



*foolishness to the Greeks*, and, indeed, to all who ever, in any age, pretended to a reason for rejecting it: of those who received it, there were not a few disgusted at its simplicity, and confident enough of their own abilities, to imagine they could improve it by alterations or additions of their own. The foremost of these were those heretics, conceitedly styled, by themselves, *Gnostics*, altho' called, by others, *Borboritæ*, or *dirt-men*; who, to give themselves the air of an extraordinary wisdom, taught, in an obscure and barbarous jargon, that the souls of men are of the proper substance of the Deity (in which they are but too closely followed by many of our Libertine writers); and yet, that such of these souls, as have been polluted by sin, shall hereafter be united to the principle of evil: for they held two principles, a good and a bad, as well as the *Manichees*. The rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity was only a compliment made to their own reason by the *Sabellians*, the *Photinians*, the *Samosatenians*, the *Arians*, and, after them, by the *Mahometans*, who disbelieved that doctrine on no one argument in the world, but because it was not to be accounted for by their all-sufficient understandings.

*Temp.* I believe you will not undertake to prove, that Popery took its rise from *Self-sufficiency*, inasmuch as reason and common sense are to be extinguished, before a man can be a thorough-paced Papist.

*Shep.* Yet Popery borrows a great deal from the belief of human-sufficiency; for on what else is the doctrine of merits, and supererogation, founded? To what end is such an abundance of human inventions, of ceremonies unknown to the primitive ages, and of pious frauds; if that Church allows Christianity, as its author left it, to be sufficient, and does not think herself able to new-model and alter it for the better?

*Temp.* The Papists, however, say, our Reformation opened a wide door to Libertinism.

*Shep.* We confess it. The sun shine of liberty and inquiry never fails to promote the growth of poisonous weeds in one soil, while it raises delicious fruits, and medicinal herbs, in another. The Pope no sooner ceased to be the sufficiency of some men, than they set

set up a sufficiency of their own, and became Popes to themselves: hence arose a crop of wilding extravagancies, as monstrous as it was various. It is in vain to think of being particular in such a wood of notional novelties, thro' which every *self-sufficient* traveller beats out a singular path of his own. I shall only take notice of the *Socinians*, who of all men, the Deists only excepted, pay the highest respect to their own understandings. Other reformers made Scripture the rule of Reformation; but the *Socinians* preferred their own reason to that office, and then forced the Scripture to authorize whatever their reason dictated. Having thus advanced their reason above the word of God, no men ever gave a more glaring proof, that human reason is not in all things an infallible guide. They say, in their *Racovian Catechism*, that those are no Christians who do not pay Divine honour and worship to Christ; and yet to this question, In what manner ought we to confide in Christ? the answer is, In the same manner as in God himself. Christ, therefore, according to them, is not God himself, and yet is to be adored with Divine worship; which, in another place of the same *Catechism*, they say is due to God only. Who, after this, will deny, that the reason of a *Socinian* is *self-sufficient*? The first, who distinguished himself in *England* as a successful adversary to religion, and a leader in *Self-sufficiency*, was *Hobbes*: this Gentleman made no scruple to speak of the light and law of nature as a chimæra; and as little, to mould Christianity to a system of his own, directly repugnant to the nature and end of all religion; for he labours to establish it as a fundamental point, that the subjects of every community ought to conform, in all religious matters, to the commands of the civil magistrate. To this he added a frightful picture of human nature, representing mankind as altogether selfish and savage. From hence, as well as from his dictating a set of religious and political notions, unknown to the world before him, it appears, that this Gentleman allowed Sufficiency to none but himself. His system was attacked from the press and pulpit, in numberless answers; and the Clergy, in particular, thought they could never  
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be too opposite to the principles of *Hobbes*: he was, however, much read, much admired, and followed by all that sort of men who are ever glad to see religion struck at with any kind of weapon, and who, in those days, were furnished with no other, or no better. His system, at length, yielded to an opposite one, set up by Bishop *Cumberland*: this great Divine represented human nature in a more amiable light, and spoke of mankind as benevolent beings, governed by a law of nature, clearly pointing out their duty to them, and enforcing the observance of it, not only by pleasing self-approbations on doing good, and by painful self-convictions and remorse upon doing evil; but also by a natural sense of religion. This system gained the easier admittance, in that every one, who espoused it, made an high compliment to himself; whereas the abettors of *Hobbism* could not stand up for it without allowing themselves to be actuated only by base and narrow principles. On this foundation, laid by the Bishop, all the moralists, whether Divines, or others, have, since that, planned their writings; but not without carrying his principles to a much greater length than he did. One, who peruses their books, can hardly help thinking they looked on man as a being who stood in no need of assistance, either to make him an able Divine, or a good man. They have told us, that the religion and law of nature are clearly revealed in the breast of every man; are of great, if not of sufficient force; are eternal, indispensable, and bind the Deity himself; nay, more, some of them have not scrupled to say, that man is rather of the same, than of a similar nature with God. These opinions have shewn themselves almost in every pulpit, and produced a set of moralizing Sermons, in most of which it seems to have been forgotten, that there is still extant a book called the word of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is laid aside, ever since reason came of age, or, rather, was esteemed eternal, divine, and capable of perfectly comprehending the nature of God; and, as to that of the satisfaction made for sin by the death of Christ, it became an antiquated topic, from the time we acquired too much righteousness of our own, to stand in need of  
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our Saviour's merits. The important sanctions of our religion are seldom mentioned, never urged; or, if they are, it is not by the names of Heaven or Hell, which a polite ear is now too delicate, or too sore, to endure; but by those soft and unalarming appellations of *future rewards and punishments*; which, however, are so far worn out of fashion, or belief, that even they are rarely used. The moral beauty of virtue serves, instead of Heaven, for an inducement; and the moral deformity of vice is insisted on, instead of Hell, for a dissuasive. The Philosopher hath turned the Preacher out of the pulpit, and given us his own (wretched alternative!) instead of the word of God.

*Temp.* These things do not pass unobserved by the Deists, who triumph in them, and say, the Clergy are making swift advances towards Libertinism.

*Shep.* That is not all: Lord *Shaftesbury* hath actually built Deism on this system, adopted by the Divines; and *Tindal* argues from little else, but quotations taken from their writings.

*Temp.* This I observed with surprize, when I read *Christianity as old as the Creation*: but, pray, does not the author misquote the passages, or pervert their meaning?

*Shep.* Not often; but he draws unfair consequences from them: and that passage, which stands qualified and restrained by other passages in its author, being singled out, and artfully introduced, in his performance, is easily made to speak the dialect of Deism: however, it must be owned, the great Divines he borrows from, altho' sound in the faith themselves, have given him but too fair an open to attack Christianity through their idea of it.

*Temp.* It seems not a little odd to me, that our Libertine writers should not, in so many books and pamphlets, published on their side of the question, have run into divisions and sects among themselves, considering how perfectly at liberty every one of them is, and how strongly prompted by vanity, to strike out what new systems he pleases. Such an uniformity is seldom found, without reason at the bottom.

*Shep.*



*Shep.* Consider, Sir, they have hitherto had nothing else to do, but to attack Christianity: as that is uniform, their arguments against it can hardly be otherwise; for none but opposite and inconsistent principles can be assaulted by inconsistent reasonings. Another cause of their coherence is, their forming clubs, in which the plan of every operation is concerted, and sometimes the whole performance compounded of matter, to which every member pays his shot. Birds and beasts of prey are sometimes observed to flock together, and make up a sort of societies; and, when they do, it is time for tamer animals to look about them.

*Temp.* The Deists, certainly, have their meetings; but what they do there, I can only guess.

*Shep.* All they have to give the world, instead of the religion they are labouring to destroy, is the light of nature, from whence they would have us to believe one uniform scheme of religion and duty must result: but this, having been sufficiently tried already, both in learned and illiterate countries, and having produced an infinite swarm of absurdities and inconsistencies only, fathers on its abettors divisions and contradictions, sufficient, I believe to change your opinion of their uniformity.

*Temp.* It is very true; I did not think of that.

*Shep.* Besides, Sir, our *English* Libertines do already in their writings, altho' they have yet had little or no temptation [to it, run strangely foul of one another. *Shaftesbury's* hypothesis destroys that of *Hobbes*; *Mandeville* attacks and defeats *Shaftesbury*; *Shaftesbury* and *Hutcheson* place the law of nature in sentiment, *Tindal* in reason; about which difference *Hutcheson* and *Balguy* have already gone together by the ears; and, as far as a victory was possible between men, who were both partly in the right, and partly in the wrong, the latter hath had the advantage. You, if you have read the performances of these authors, cannot but be sensible I have rightly represented their differences.

*Temp.* I read them with eyes blinded by prejudice; so that, as they appeared to undermine or baffle the religion I wanted to be rid of, I either did not perceive their contradictions, or, when I did, took it for granted, that

that one of them, at least, must be in the right. I saw no defects in performances that, one way or other, answered my purposes so well: but I now recollect enough to justify your representation.

*Shep.* And is not the species of philosophy, we have been speaking of, rightly styled the *self-sufficient Scheme*? How wise, how perfect, how independent a being is man, in human speculation! but how weak and purblind, how corrupt, and prone to wickedness, when weighed in the balance of experience! When the necessity of revelation is to be invalidated, man is, by nature, a gloriously enlightened, a well-disposed, a just, and benevolent being: yet, when he is to be taught and trained to either religious or social duties, he is, for the most part, found either very stupid, or perverse; and when he is to be dealt with in the way of business, all manner of precautions and securities are found necessary to guard against the effects of his dissimulation. This being, who, by the strength of his unassisted reason, can know so little, and who, by the corrupt disposition of his will, can practise less, stands in no need of God's instructions, nor of stronger motives to the performance of his duty, than what arise from within himself; is, in a word, perfect and *self-sufficient*. The experiments of five thousand years, all ending in the grossest folly and wickedness, are not enough to convince him, that he can neither be good, nor happy, without the Divine assistance.

*Temp.* Thro' you, Mr. *Shepherd*, God hath at length opened my eyes; the scales are fallen off; I am, for the first time, made sensible of my own insufficiency, and of the necessity of Divine instruction and grace. It is now matter of amazement to me, that *self-sufficient* principles could ever have been introduced into a thinking mind.

*Shep.* It is a question with me, whether they ever were.

*Temp.* Why, was I not a wretched instance of the kind myself?

*Shep.* Did you not fall under the guardianship of Mr. *Dechaine*, when you was in your fifteenth year?

*Temp.*

*Temp.* I did.

*Shep.* Was not Mr. *Cunningham* then employed as your tutor?

*Temp.* He was. What a loss did I suffer by the death of my dear father!

*Shep.* Did not your Guardian and Tutor take some pains to instil into you the principles of *Libertinism*?

*Temp.* I was no sooner in their power, than they began to wean me from Christianity, and to blow me up into an high opinion of myself. In order to the first, I was entertained, on all occasions, with jests and flouts at religion, drawn, as I afterwards found, from *Libertine* books. We were often merry on almost every historical passage in the Bible; particularly on the creation, the fall of man, the flood, *Abraham's* offering up his Son, the passage of the *Red Sea*, *Samson's* exploit with the jaw-bone of an ass, the adultery of *David*, the idolatry of *Solomon*; and, I am shocked when I recollect it, on the birth, and even the death, of our Blessed Saviour. We had a thousand sneers about Heaven and Hell; and, as for the Sabbath, and the Sacraments, they were our standing topics of ridicule. Mr. *Cunningham*, indeed, seldom jested with such things; but whenever Mr. *Dechaine* did, my good Tutor shewed, by an applauding laugh, that he enjoyed the joke. Our table was every day crouded with young Gentlemen, some of them *Templers*, who were wondrous sprightly upon the subject of religion, and, above all, on the characters of the Clergy. The Parson of our Parish was of infinite use to us: he is a poor creature, without either sense or spirit; fond of a good bit and a bottle, and of a mien that provokes a jest. When we lived in the country, he dined with us almost every day, and seemed to be brought industriously into my view, in order to represent his brethren, and give me a mean idea of them. My servants (for it was at my house we passed the summers) knew my Guardian's mind well enough, and made their court by using the poor wretch like a dog. One would give him dirty water, when he called for *October*; another would strike the edge of a dish against his cheek, as he took it off the table; a third would spill a bowl of butter on his

his gown, and then ask pardon with a sneer. You may be sure these pranks afforded us too much diversion to be discouraged. How careless you are! was the utmost reproof. We went every *Sunday* to church, and set a most edifying example before the eyes of the congregation; for we whispered and laughed during the time we spent there; and when the Parson went into the pulpit, Mr. *Dechaine* was as constant to one favourite jest, as the Preacher was to his initial prayer. Now for a miracle! *Balaam's* ass is going to open. But when Mr. *Cunningham* preached, which was very seldom, we were all decorum and attention. Whether he hath more sermons than livings, I know not; but I never heard more than two from him, the one on the twentieth verse of the first chapter of the Epistle to the *Romans*, and the other on the fourteenth and fifteenth verses of the second chapter of the same Epistle. From these he drew, as I thought, a refutation of Christianity, in short harangues, consisting of quaint and affected periods, and delivered with a better action than accent; for when he goes into the pulpit, he leaves his own voice and manner of speaking behind him, and surprises his acquaintances with another, wholly unnatural, thro' which an uncouth monotony, or tune, reigns from the beginning to the end.

*Shep.* Well; but how did you spend your evenings, and leisure-hours?

*Temp.* When my Tutor and I were by ourselves, we read *Hobbes*, *Shaftesbury*, *Collins*, *Toland*, *Tindal*, and such books. Some mornings we hunted, and from breakfast to dinner we read news-papers, pamphlets, magazines, plays and novels.

*Shep.* And in the evenings?

*Temp.* We were constant to the spinet and card-table, not excepting on *Sundays*.

*Shep.* What means did they make use of to fill you with an high opinion of yourself?

*Temp.* That was easily done. I had an early and strong propensity to pride; and neither my Guardian, nor my Tutor, ever did any thing to humble it. On the contrary, there was no provocative to it in my family, in my fortune, in my understanding or person.



that was not greatly magnified, and highly seasoned to me; by the flattery of my Tutor, Servants, Tenants, and of every body that came near me. On such a foundation laid in me, it was no difficult matter to build the *self-sufficient* principle, that is, to make me think my own understanding a sufficient guide, and my own will the best rule for my actions. This was done with much art, and by degrees, as my understanding grew strong enough to go along with their reasonings.

*Shep.* Did the Christian principles, you had formerly been bred up in, give no opposition?

*Temp.* None at all.

*Shep.* You surprise me.

*Temp.* I will tell you how that came to pass. They found me so full of Christianity and Scripture, that it would have been impossible to introduce Libertinism into my mind, had they shewn it openly to me. For this reason they covered it at first under the appearance of a more sensible sort of Christianity than my own. You know all the Libertine writers pretend to be of our religion, and profess only an intention to recommend a truer idea of it, than that which is vulgarly entertained. This enabled my Tutor to teach me Christianity out of *Hobbes*, *Shaftesbury*, *Collins*, *Toland*, and *Tindal*; inso-much that, I assure you, I was a Libertine, almost a Deist, before I had any notion I had ceased to be a Christian. Never was there such a juggle as was played in my mind, nor so artful an instiller of loose principles, as my Tutor.

*Shep.* Had you not something within you, that held correspondence with him, and helped to carry on the cheat?

*Temp.* Ay, that I had, or he could have done little or nothing. I had one or two passions, that stood, as it were, agape for all he said; and, altho' a strong sense of religion still held them in, yet they were straining on the slip, when his precepts halloo'd them to the game. My pride, which I have already taken notice of, soon made religious instructions, conveyed to me thro' a vilified Clergy, despicable in my eyes. I looked upon myself as sharing in the honour, with my Libertine authors,

authors, of finding out new and singular notions. I now knew something that others did not know, and was even vain of understanding performances, too artfully, and too obscurely wrote, for every reader to see thro'. My new opinions made me so high a compliment, in trusting me with myself; and Christianity set me in so scurvy a light, and presented itself to me with an aspect I thought so assuming and severe; that I preferred the former to the latter, with the same turn of mind exactly that I felt, when, on my first acquaintance with you, I compared your blunt freedom with Mr. *Cunningham's* obsequiousness.

*Shep.* I did not perceive by your behaviour, that I had disoblged you.

*Temp.* I was only a little disgusted; and it was not my good manners (for I had not been accustomed to shew much to a poor Clergyman) that hindered me from discovering it; but the spirit and firmness you shewed, awed me at the very first; your anxiety to disengage me from bad principles gained upon my heart; and, soon after, your reasonings set you above my contempt.

*Shep.* You intimated just now, that you had somewhat else within you, beside your pride, which helped to recommend the Libertine principles to you. Pray, what was that?

*Temp.* Pardon me, Sir; it is not fit to name before you. Thus much, however, I will hint to you, that I was fond of pleasure, of a particular pleasure, which Christianity would not tolerate, and which my new principles did. A very near relation of Mr. *Cunningham's* reaped the first-fruits of the education he had given me; which, however, did not disturb our harmony in the least. Thus you see, Sir, how I became a Libertine.

*Shep.* And may not another become a Libertine by the same or the like methods?

*Temp.* He may.

*Shep.* And yet you expressed great surprize, a little while ago, that a thinking mind should ever entertain the *self-sufficient* scheme. It was also matter of astonishment to you, that an Angel of light should set up for it in the

presence, and the beatific vision, of God. When irreligion and sin are examined by unprejudiced reason, they seem the most amazing of all miracles; but when we come to consider the nature of a finite and fallible being, we quickly perceive the possibility of his fall; and, supposing him once fallen to a certain depth, we may easily imagine him capable of sinking still deeper and deeper, till he loses sight of God, and every thing that is good.

*Temp.* This is very true; but mine, you may perceive, was a very peculiar case. No man was ever so beset with snares and temptations, as I was; and therefore I am still at a loss to account for the propagation of Libertinism, what it is that paves so broad a road for it, and how that road can be carried on almost to the very dregs of the people.

*Shep.* O, Mr. *Templeton*, do not think, that you, of all men, have undergone the most ensnaring trials. Pride, love of pleasure, licentiousness, and false reasoning, extend from the highest to the very lowest rank of men. Vice and debauchery follow, foot for foot; and wherever they are found, Libertinism is either already with them, or must be procured at any rate. You have given me a lively picture of the springs and progress of Libertinism in one and the same mind. Give me leave to shew how it passes from one mind to another in cases very different from yours, till it arrives at public countenance.

**M**AN, being a social creature, and having many wants, which he cannot of himself supply, hath recourse to commerce, and the assistance of others, for that purpose. He who was bred up under the influence of religion, and who is still a believer, notwithstanding his having fallen into a vicious course of life, must undoubtedly be in great distress for two sorts of commodities; one is a cure for his religion, and the other, a sufficient reason, or a proper principle, to be wicked on. As soon as he finds one who can furnish him, he endeavours to settle a correspondence with him, in which both parties may find their accounts. The person he proposes to deal with, being infinitely conceited; is in as great

great want of flattery and applause; to sooth his uneasy vanity. These two are fitted to one another, like the male and female screw; the one fills up the vacuities and deficiencies of the other. The one imparts a pleasing Self-sufficiency, and is paid with a delicious mess of admiration and flattery. Now this delightful commerce can never fail to be carried on, till Infidels cease to be conceited, or bad men find a way to reconcile the rigid principles of religion with an atrocious life. A country drenched in luxury and excess always swarms with these two sorts of men, the conceited Infidel, and the debauched Believer, who are so cut out for each other, that they can hardly subsist asunder; for, if you separate them, the one must be destitute of an opiate for his conscience, and the other, of food for his vanity. No remedy can be found for the festering sting of remorse in a mind determined to be wicked, but Infidelity; and no one will applaud or flatter an Infidel, as such, but he who hath reduced himself to the infernal necessity of being one himself. How can he, who is distinguished from the vulgar in all things else, bear to be of the same religion? No; here too it is fit he should be majestically singular. If he is to have any religion, it must be an uncommon one, and *Self-sufficiency* best answers that, as well as all his other purposes. How can he, who is racked with violent passions, and stung with keen appetites, such as avarice, ambition, gluttony, drunkenness, and lust, see the country he lives in, crowded with gratifications for them all, and endure to be withheld by faith, which makes not a single promise to his desires; for he hath none that are refined or spiritual? As things go, a scrupulous Christian cannot rise suddenly to wealth and grandeur; neither can he, consistently with the fashion, have a full enjoyment of the fortune he may have been born to; for, as to the present reigning pleasures, on which the fortunes of the wealthy are expended, Christianity protests against the far greater part of them, and licenses only such, as disuse among the great, notwithstanding the pure and exquisite delight they impart, hath either almost wholly antiquated, or degraded to the lower ranks of mankind. Hence arises



a loud and almost universal demand for Infidelity; wealth, luxury, and refinement, being of little value without it, nay, Infidelity being itself the grand article of luxury, that spices all the rest, the highest point of refinement, that whets the taste, and exalts it into perfection. Libertinism had no considerable footing in *England* before *Cromwell's* time, when it was covered, down to the very cloven foot of contradictory absurdities, in the long cloak of cant, hypocrisy, and enthusiasm. During this dark and stormy night of troubled dreams, *Hobbes* set up a standard for Deism, or rather Atheism; to which in a little time resorted all such as were willing to think there was nothing more in religion than hypocrisy or fanaticism. These sort of men in the reign of *Charles* the Second, which was the reign of luxury and debauchery, taking that to be religion, which had worn such a fool's coat in the preceding times of confusion, made a jest of all religion. The Jesuits, those men of all shapes and colours, who had been extremely active in turning religion into a medley of absurdities, were now equally industrious to ascribe this monstrous produce of their own labour to the Reformation, in order to draw back as many as they could to themselves, and to push those forward into Libertinism, who were already too far gone to be reclaimed, by charging all these absurdities on Christianity itself. Contempt for cant and hypocrisy was artfully turned into contempt for Christianity, by the profane wits, who aimed at a total destruction of religion, and by the Papists, who wished to see us Atheists rather than Protestants. Since the late Revolution it hath been all along a favourite and ruling maxim, to push religious and civil liberty to the utmost. The Clergy, having been looked on as the greatest obstacle to both, fell into disrepute with one half of the people, of whom such as set up for Politicians, transferred a part of their resentments and jealousies to the religion they preached. All this time trade was extending, money increasing, and articles of luxury, which are no other than incentives to debauchery, flowing in upon us from every quarter of the world. The richer Clergy were hated, the poorer despised;

despised; and religion, as it passed thro' their hands, became either odious or despicable, to all that large class of men, who thirsted for an increase of liberty, in proportion as more restraint grew necessary to curb the career of their vices.

*Temp.* What a field was here to sow tares in! Never was there so rank a soil for Popery, which makes vice and salvation consistent, nor for Libertinism, which gives a man up to himself, to thrive in.

*Shep.* Accordingly, the propagators of both were far enough from slipping the season. The Missionaries of *Rome*, having found their sophistry an unequal match for the reason of the *London* Divines, and perceiving that no good was to be done by an open appeal to the understandings of a sensible people, began to practise in secret on their vicious dispositions, in order to draw them backward, and by the wrong end, into Popery.

*Temp.* And it is said, they found their account in this expedient.

*Shep.* How could it otherwise choose? There are always vast numbers of people, who retain an high veneration for the name of Christians, and who nevertheless are made impatient by their vices of every Christian restraint. To such as these a religion, that brings with it the name of Christianity, and at the same time a cheap market of indulgences and dispensations, must be extremely acceptable. The wisdom of above eight hundred years hath been labouring to accommodate Popery to the vices of its professors, yet so as still to retain a shew of Christianity. This was a sufficient task for the policy of *Rome* itself; and had been to this day unaccomplished, but for the jesuitical casuistry.

*Temp.* What the Jesuits have done to make Christianity convenient, may be seen in the *Provincial Letters* of Mons. *Pascal*, by which it appears, that one who hath a Jesuit for his casuist and confessor, hath no need to turn Libertine.

*Shep.* Jesuitism, in Popish countries, where people are forced by arbitrary power to profess a sort of Christianity, serves well enough instead of *Libertinism*. But in a free country, like this, there is no need of having re-

course to such shifts. Here it is too slavish to have the conscience under direction. Here every man hath his casuistry within himself, and is his own Jesuit, I mean, is *self-sufficient*. However, before a man can be *self-sufficient*, even here, means are to be made use of; and instruction, which must be denied to Christianity, is altogether allowable, because necessary to *Libertinism*.

*Temp.* It is true; and, were it not to avoid a contradiction, I should say, that *Self-sufficiency* stands in extreme need of assistance.

*Skep.* You did not arrive at it without a Tutor; neither could he have made you such a proficient without the help of books.

I WAS going to say, that the Libertine writings, with which we are furnished, are of three kinds: but in this I should have made a mistake; for they are only of three degrees: those of the first furnish hints and principles for self-sufficiency; those of the second serve as preparatives to it, by so mangling and misrepresenting revelation, that it seems expedient to look into ourselves for some other system; and those of the third, altho' still preserving some appearance of Christianity, lead the reader into the very porch of Deism, where they leave him, what one would think it impossible for any man to be, a sort of *Christian Deist* (a). As to the first, they were penned by a few, who had a most sincere attachment to Christianity, and firmly believed all its doctrines; but, however, defended it, or rather refuted its adversaries, on principles foreign to itself, suggested to them merely by their opposition to those on which it was attacked. While these performances drove the present adversary out of the field, it was not perceived, that they laid religion open on the opposite side, to other opponents, more to be apprehended; and therefore it was thought they could not be pushed too far. An abstruse treatise, wrote by the learned Bishop already mentioned, the great adversary of *Hobbes*, was the magazine of these principles: from hence the writings of the second class,

(a) See the Moral Philosopher, Title page, and p. 392. Chubb's True Gospel.

which

which may be called the preparatives to Deism, borrowed a plan of morality, deducible, as it was represented, from the light of nature, and independent of revealed religion: to this was added, by some of those who laboured on it, a new model of Christianity, in which the mysteries were half explained away, and the sanctions, being now less necessary upon the discovery of a sufficient moral obligation, were therefore less insisted on. The *Socinians*, and all the Half-libertines, took sanctuary in this system, as more dependent on themselves, and more manageable, than the old Christianity, which could not be easily bent to their conceits. It was natural for men, who deified their own reason, and wished for a licence to indulge their desires, to rid their minds, as far as they could, of a belief in doctrines above their comprehension, or contrary to their affections.

*Temp.* Be so good, Sir, as to furnish me with an instance or two.

*Sbcp.* The most remarkable writer of this class was *Divisus*, who, by his great abilities, and regular life, reflected no small reputation on his party. He was both a great Mathematician and Divine: his discourses, which abounded with moral reasonings, and leaned chiefly on the religion and law of nature, were, as to the matter, drawn mostly from within himself, and rather illustrated, than supported, by quotations from Scripture. His principles, which were *Semi-arian*, made him almost a Christian; and his conduct, as to promotion, made him almost an honest man: for altho', by subscribing to principles he did not like, and endeavoured to overturn in his writings, he held a considerable benefice; yet his disapprobation of those principles hindered him from accepting of an higher place in the Church, which, it is certain, he might have had. Great learning, and high refinement, were necessary to the forming distinctions, so extremely nice, both for belief and practice. It is hard to say whether his name, or writings, gave the greater countenance to the *Semi-christian* party, of which he was at the head. There never was a man who had greater charity, or an opener benevolence, for all who differed from him in opinion: few men ever wrote better



for revelation, nor worse for their own detached notions about particular doctrines: from whence it plainly appears, that he was sincerely a Christian, altho' on a model different from that of his Church. Yet his regard for Christianity did not hinder him from soliciting the enlargement of *Woolston*; but he gave it as his reason for so doing, that *Woolston* had only taken that liberty which he himself had all his life been contending for. Surely *Diwifus* was mistaken; for the liberty, assumed by *Woolston*, was not to argue for truth in an open and ingenuous manner, but by low chicane, and base artifices, to spit his venom on the miracles of our Saviour.

*Temp.* I have read *Woolston's* book upon the miracles, and am sure the Gentleman you are speaking of, could never, but by a gross mistake, find the least resemblance between his own and *Woolston's* liberties.

*Shep.* What were precisely the Christian principles of *Apobles*, is hard to say; for he reduces the Creed of a Christian to this short proposition, Christ *was the Messiah*; and thinks it no way incumbent on us to believe any thing concerning the nature of Christ's person, as differing from that of other men. This obscure Creed was, in the opinion of *Apobles*, sufficiently comprehensive to take in all denominations of Christians, and give peace and uniformity to the Church. I will readily allow, all sorts of Christians might join in such a confession of their faith; but must insist, they would be still as far from peace and agreement as ever; because, if we believe Christ to be the *Messiah*, that is, the chosen and anointed messenger of God, we must, in consequence, believe, that whatsoever he, or those who spoke by his spirit and authority, have revealed to us, is true. Now if he and his Apostles have often and strongly inculcated the doctrines of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, of the Satisfaction, of the Resurrection, and a future Judgment; we cannot believe Christ to be the *Messiah*, without believing those doctrines not only to be true, but of the greatest importance to us; and therefore they too must make a part of our confession, as well as of our faith, if a confession is to be made at all. From hence it appears, that he who confesses his faith by this Gentleman's Creed, must

must be held to the consequential articles, or else his confession passes for nothing, and leaves the door as open to differences as ever.

*Temp.* But does he not grant, that whatsoever is plainly set forth in the New Testament ought to make a part of our faith?

*Shep.* He does; but insists, it is only by implication that it ought to do so, and that the Christian liberty exempts us from any obligation to declare for more than the Messiahship of Christ. Great as this Gentleman's abilities were, we may take the liberty to say, he depended too much upon them, when he undertook the defence of a principle so subversive of itself, and so productive of a promiscuous communion among persons who may happen to agree in nothing but the bare repetition of a general proposition, understood in quite different senses. To what end should a confession of any principle be made, if nothing particular or determinate can be gathered from that confession? His maintaining that a power to think might be superadded to matter, as matter, was not a stronger instance, either of his fallibility, or self-dependence, than this. The best reasoners may be led into error by too high an opinion of their own abilities; which often puts men upon inventing systems, that raise far greater difficulties than those they are applied to the removal of. As recourse is, at last, to be had to the faculty of reason, in order to fix our assent, not only to articles of knowledge, but of belief; nothing can be more necessary, than to know the extent of reason, without which it is impossible to be acquainted with either its strength or weakness. Now he who is not sensible of the one, becomes immediately *self-sufficient*; and he who is unacquainted with the other, lies open to every imposer of opinions: by which means it comes to pass, that when this measure of truth is imagined to be either longer or shorter than it is, mistakes must arise from the application of it. Hence, again, it proceeds, that men of the greatest geniuses are as liable to gross mistakes, as narrower minds, that are not so *self-sufficient*; and that they are often no less distinguished by the enormity of their opinions, than by the superiority of their talents. As God

does not always give *the race to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*; so, to humble the pride of human wisdom, when it begins to swell, he often leaves it to itself, that, by its falling into the most ridiculous opinions, and monstrous errors, it may become sensible of its own infirmity, and that it may learn to confine its inquiries within modest bounds, to search only for useful knowlege, and to depend on superior assistance for success, even in that. The *Montanism* of *Tertullian*, the *Manicheism* of *Bayle*, with a thousand instances of the like nature, serve to exemplify what I have been saying.

*Temp.* These men you place in the second class, namely, of those who furnish preparatives to Deism. Your *Divisus* and *Apobles* put me in mind of many others, some of whom are still alive, and active in the same service: but, pray, who are they that constitute your third class?

*Shep.* They are a set of men, of whom it is hard to say what principles of Christianity they retain, or what they aim at by their writings; but it is certain, that their disciples and admirers are absolute Libertines. It is true, they affect the name of Christians; but if you enter into close debate with them on the fundamental articles of Christianity, you will find, there is scarcely one of them who will not explain away, or formally renounce, all those articles; and that, even when they are most guarded, they will deny it to be our duty to confess our faith in them, or the business of the Church to require any such confession of us. In short, you will perceive, that they are mere nominal Christians, and that their whole body of Divinity is reduced to the first question and answer in the Catechism. There is but one principle to which they are constant, and on which they erect their standard: it is this; that, let a man's religion be what it will, he must be acceptable in the sight of God, provided he is sincere in it.

*Temp.* Methinks I see my good Tutor filing off into the third rank.

*Shep.* You will be better able to judge, just now, whether he is to be placed with this sort of men, in comparison of whom, the open Deist is a Saint. One illustrious character will decypher all the rest. *Phyodexius*, who

who always shewed himself a much sounder politician than Divine, rose, step by step, to one of the richest chairs in our Church ; and, as he ascended, gave all the proofs of his orthodoxy, that the solemn formality of subscriptions, assents, and consents, could possibly draw from any man : notwithstanding this, he laboured hard to prove, that those who do not love our Church, ought to be put in a capacity to destroy it, by the demolition of its legal barrier. He daily pronounced the absolutions of our *Rubric* in the face of the Church ; yet told the world, thro' the press, they were no absolutions at all. In the same place he daily repeated our Creeds ; yet, in several parts of his works, borrowed arguments from the writings of *Socinians*, which, by an artful turn, he so levelled against the doctrines, either contained in, or necessarily resulting from, those Creeds, that he who reads his books grows heterodox himself, while he believes the writer to be orthodox. This effect is not more artfully pushed for, in any of his performances, than in his most celebrated book ; whereby he insinuates what he would have us take to be the only necessary conditions upon which the favour of God is to be obtained. Herein it is that he dwells on moral conditions only, and, by slight touches, and double expressions, eludes the necessity of faith in the meritorious death of Christ. No kind of book can be a more dangerous snare to a Christian reader, than that which, pretending to set before him all that is necessary for him to know and practise, in order to his salvation, does, nevertheless, slip unobserved over some of the most important points, and fixes the attention solely on the rest. Thus an article of faith, that cannot decently be refuted, may be dropt, and kept out of sight ; so that the reader shall have no occasion given him to think of that article at all, much less to consider it as necessary to be believed in. Notwithstanding these instances of disingenuous dealing, as if he intended to usher into the world a severe invective against himself, he published a discourse, in which, among other things, he sets forth, that it matters not so much, what our religious principles are, as it does that we be sincere in them ; reducing, in a manner, the whole duty of man to that of sincerity,



sincerity, of which he had given the world so bright an example in his own practice and professions. As no man can help being internally sincere in his own real principles, the sincerity inculcated by *Phyodexius* must consist in a conformity between our real principles and outward professions. How far his behaviour, as a Clergyman, hath been consonant to his one only necessary principle, let the world judge: however, that the edifying example, displayed in his former conduct, might not wear out of the memories of mankind, he continued to stand at the holy altar of God, consecrating and administering the blessed Sacrament by the prescript form of our Church; while, in the mean time, his books ran into the eager hands of unwary people; telling them, that if they minded either the Scriptures, or our Communion-service, they must be convinced, the consecration and preparation, usually required in order to the right receiving of that Sacrament, are needless, or rather prejudicial, niceties. This may have been a proof of his sincerity, just as it is a testimony of his zeal for Christianity, that, during these twenty years past, while it was both secretly undermined, and openly assaulted, he hath never once thought fit to employ his great talents in its defence, but hath, in some measure, furthered the designs of its adversaries by performances so judiciously calculated to subvert the principles and piety of Christians, that it is a doubt, whether all the Libertine writings in our language have wounded our religion so sensibly, or so far enfeebled the virtue of its professors, as the works of this one Divine. Besides, the Deists have made a considerable use of his writings, in their books against Christianity; and yet he hath not so much as attempted to vindicate those writings, as inapplicable to such purposes; but, on the contrary, hath rather endeavoured to strike the weapons out of the hands of those who were defending the faith he professed.

*Temp.* How is so much dissimulation to be accounted for in a man so remarkable for the goodness of his life and conversation, that I question whether there ever was a Clergyman in our Church who left a more amiable character

rafter behind him in the several places where he exercised his ministry?

*Shep.* It often happens, that men who are good in all other respects, have one particular failing, one lean insatiable desire, that seems to swallow up all their other passions, and runs them into excesses, sufficient to level them with the rest of mankind. If such was the case of *Phyodexius*, ambition must have been his darling passion. It is not easily conceived by the unaspiring, how far some men may be transported by the desire of distinguishing themselves, not only in their own, but to all succeeding times; nor do you seem to consider, that exploits, which are far from truly deserving applause, may be successfully employed for this purpose. Those very men, who spread slaughter and devastation thro' a people, are often thereby rendered popular, and raised to the supreme power; in a more pacific character, the display of great talents, exerted for the overthrow of old opinions, and the advancement of new, shall set a man on the highest pinnacle of fame that character admits of; while, in the mean time, the truth of those opinions is compared, and the arts, made use of to turn the scale in favour of the latter, are considered, by few.

*Temp.* But when one, highly distinguished for his virtues, labours to change the sentiments of mankind in relation to religious matters, do not reason and charity require, that we should attribute his industry to a zeal for truth, and a desire of doing good?

*Shep.* They do, provided the means he makes use of are open, honest, and ingenuus; but, if they deserve the contrary epithets, how can a zeal for truth be at the bottom? If the means are evil, how can the end and intention be good?

*Temp.* Perhaps the good intended cannot be effected by better means.

*Shep.* Then it is never to be attempted, because we are forbid, expressly, *to do evil, that good may come of it.* The service of an infinitely wise, good, and powerful Being, deigns not to receive assistance from chicane and double-dealing, which are neither consistent with it, nor  
wanted

wanted by it. If *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, much less can his dissimulation do it.

*Temp.* Does not *Christ* lay it down for a rule, that the quality of a man's principles are to be judged of by the fruits or effects of those principles in his life and conversation? And how, then, can a man's principles be bad, if his actions are good?

*Shep.* This criterion of principles, proposed by our Saviour for the use of those who might not have penetration enough to see into the real tendency of the principles themselves, is by no means what you take it to be. His words are these; *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits: Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?* Here it is plainly intimated, that these false prophets, or teachers, appear to be good men; for *they come in sheep's cloathing*; and therefore the fruits, by which the quality of their doctrines is to be found out, are the tendency and effects of those doctrines upon those who embrace them. Before the badness of a doctrine can be discovered by the vices of him who preaches it, the sheep's clothing must be laid aside, and his ill life made manifest. Till this happens, if speculative reasonings cannot unmask the doctrine, an experiment of its effects on ourselves, or others, affords the only means of judging whether it ought to be acquiesced in, or not. This mark, or rule, to censure doctrines by, is, however, as I have already observed, given only for the use of such as are not perfectly acquainted with the truths of religion. But all men, already instructed by *the oracles of God*, are commanded to *search the Scriptures*, and to *try the spirits* of such as pretend to teach: nay, *St. Paul* is so far from allowing the virtue of a teacher to vouch for the rectitude of his documents, that he lays a bar against depending on the purity even of an Angel, for such a purpose. But if the sins of the teacher himself are sufficient to bring suspicion on his instructions, why should we open our ears and hearts to him who introduces what he would inculcate with artifice and dissimulation? Or is artifice, which we detest in others, no sin in a teacher of religion? This way  
of

of using art, in matters of religion, to which it is, of all things, most repugnant, hath been, for some time, extremely in vogue among us, and hath been attended with a remarkable decay of piety and common honesty, as is but too sensibly felt by every man in his private dealings, and by the community, in a want of public spirit, and fidelity to our country.

*Temp.* Whence does it proceed, that loose principles of religion, without any thing else to introduce them but arts so glaringly disingenuous, should ever make a progress among mankind?

*Shep.* Bad principles, recommended by as bad arts, must have perished in the very birth, had there not been numbers among us, to whom loose principles are ever as acceptable, as the licence they bring along with them. With such it can be no objection to the writer they stand in need of, that he uses as much art as is necessary to their purposes; that he does not alarm them by setting out with a declaration against religion; but, making a shew, at first, of much the same sentiments of Christianity with their own, seems, by the same imperceptible steps, at once to write himself, and his readers, out of all disquietudes about religion. These performances, thus artfully managed, are also admirably fitted to ensnare the candid inquirer after truth, who hath no intention to desert his religion; but, having more curiosity than judgment, and being willing to read on all sides of the controversy, is never so likely to make shipwreck of his faith, as when he strikes on a work of this kind. Now the present age is so plentifully stocked with libertine books, and their contents are so often made the subject of discourse, that a man hath no business to set up for reading, or for learned conversation, without a competent knowledge of them. A reader of moderate talents, not knowing the extent of his own understanding, and taking it to be much greater than it is, thinks himself a match for any writer. Upon the strength of this conceit, he launches, without fear, into a controversy he is by no means equal to; the result of which is, that a medley of undigested notions, crowding into his head, fill it with a perfect chaos of inconsistencies; this confusion



fusion naturally produces doubts; and they, for the most part, lead to infidelity. Such is the effect in a weak mind, after having read the *True Gospel* of Chubb, the *Moral Philosopher* of Morgan, and the like performances.

*Temp.* I know two or three young gentlemen, who read even the *Characteristics*, the *Independent Whig*, the *Grounds and reasons of Christianity*; subscribe to all they find in those books; and, nevertheless, actually take themselves to be Christians.

*Shep.* This frequently happens, and proceeds from their not knowing what Christianity is, nor rightly understanding what the writers drive at in those performances: yet the readers you speak of, are so well satisfied with themselves, that they will hardly allow their admired authors a greater share of sense. If I mistake not, I have seen some of these your acquaintances in the pulpit, edifying their hearers, not with a discourse founded on the Scriptures, nor stolen from *Tillotson*, but with a fine philosophical essay about moral beauty, and the internal senses, wiredrawn from the writings of Mr. *Hutcheson*, who only refines on those of Lord *Shaftesbury*.

*Temp.* I cannot see what a preacher can propose to himself by trifling on such topics.

*Shep.* A discourse of this kind shews, that he who delivers it is not one of your ordinary Divines; and, besides, contributes not a little to the repose of all that hear it; whereas a too scriptural performance seems tritcal, and may excite an uneasy ruffle in the consciences of the audience, already inclined to doze over their sins. Conceit in the preacher, and a mistaken delicacy in the hearer, produce all these unscriptural Sermons.

*Temp.* It is not, indeed, to be wondered at, that men, so self-conceited, should draw but little from the Scriptures, which present us with a mortifying picture of our own insufficiency and vileness. It is, I verily believe, for this, among other reasons, that they deal by the Sacred Writings, at present so much neglected, as the old woman did by the mirror, which she found in a dunghil: after wondering how so beautiful a thing should be placed in so contemptible a situation, it no sooner presented her  
with

with a glimpse of her own loathsome countenance, than she threw it where she found it, and said, " You are  
" deservedly cast out into that filthy place by all people,  
" for impudently misrepresenting them to themselves."

*Ship.* Your apologue is too just and plain to need a comment. If advice, of any kind, is to be given, it must be so managed, as neither to call the conduct of the giver in question, nor to disturb the consciences of those, to whom it is directed. An adviser must have a care of pushing with a weapon that hath a point at either end. Our very fashionable teachers are aware of this, and therefore make but little use of the Scriptures, as well out of tenderness to themselves, as because they find little therein, but such things as, if digested into their discourses, would disgust or shock a polite ear. These physicians suit their medicines to the palates, not the distempers, of their patients; and are even so unfaithful, as to give *laudanum* for a lethargy. If they do vouchsafe to draw any thing from the Scriptures, they pick out such expressions as seem to countenance their novelties, when torn from the context, or wrest others to their own fancies; out of their abundance of *Self-sufficiency* they make doctrines, instead of delivering messages: full of themselves, they presume to prompt the Holy Ghost, and shew the force of their talents in dissipating the vulgar errors of Theology, in correcting antiquity, and striking out new lights, unknown to former ages. Hence it is, that their discourses, which often pervert the judgment, without ever touching or mending the heart, please only those who relish a Novel better than the Bible. A preacher, who, in handling a practical subject, does not make it his chief endeavour to turn the attention of his audience on the continual inspection of Almighty God, and on a future judgment, does but beat the air; and as he speaks without spirit and power, so he speaks without effect. He who is studious of entertaining, rather than of reforming his hearers, accommodates his discourse only to the genteeler part of his audience, few of whom can bear, with patience, the awful doctrines of our religion. He knows, that *from the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in them, but wounds, and bruises,*

*bruises, and putrefying sores*; wherefore he either touches them not at all, or, if he does, it is with something softer than velvet: instead of a Sermon, he gives them a curt Harangue, made up of pretty little thoughts, tricked out in spruce phrases, that light on the audience, like snow, so cool and gentle, that they are but just perceived. Altho' the ears of those he speaks to are shut against the voice of religion by the foul ulcer of luxury, pride, and *self-sufficiency*, and therefore ought to be lanced with thunder; yet he only tickles them with novelties and heresies, and soothes them with stupefying or poisonous palliatives. While the spirit of Christianity is often thus banished from the pulpit, that of Libertinism hath a free course thro' the press, and assumes a boldness in conversation and coffee-house harangues, which is scarcely indulged to Christianity. From this view of the times, I believe, Sir, you will agree, that the road down to Deism is made sufficiently broad and smooth.

*Temp.* Yes; but I think your two last classes, instead of preparing the way to it, have conducted their disciples thither already, and have left nothing for a professor of Deism to do.

*Shep.* O, Sir, a great deal; such betrayers of religion only serve as step-stones, upon which the weaker and more squeamish sort of Libertines go over to Deism; there being few, who have in themselves a sufficient stretch of genius to cross the wide gulph between religion and infidelity at one stride, or strength enough to reach the further bank at one leap. Those who help them over, do but land them in the shallow water and mud of infidelity, where the thorough-paced Deist is ready to lend them his shoulders. It is the business of a master workman to finish these infidels, who are, as yet, but blocked out to their hands. The new proficient in *Self-sufficiency* still look on themselves only as a sort of Libertine Christians.

*Temp.* Among the several performances that inculcate Deistical, under the mask of Christian principles, don't you comprehend the late famous *Introductory discourse*, &c. relating to miracles? The Deists triumph in that, and some other writings of the same author. I should

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be surpris'd to hear the Clergy were as well satisfied with them.

*Shep.* We have already considered the Clergy as not all equally remote from Deism: besides, the book you inquire about, notwithstanding the use it is of to the Deists, may have proceeded from a real love of truth in the author, spiced, however, with a *self-sufficient* ostentation of uncommon sagacity and learning. It is, undoubtedly, of some service to any truth, to prune away from it all the excrescencies that usually shoot out of it, while it is lodged in minds irregularly prolific; because such never fail to give it a grotesque appearance in the eye of better reason. False arguments also hurt a good cause, when, by long and frequent use, they seem to grow to it, and incorporate with it. Had the author ever signalized his abilities, which I never heard that he did, in the defence of our common Christianity, against the continual assaults of its adversaries; such performances, as his last, might very well admit of a favourable interpretation. But, having, instead of this, endeavoured to beat down some arguments, usually brought for its support, which, nevertheless, keep their ground in the estimation of the judicious; having condemned, without distinction, the miracles said to have been wrought in the early ages succeeding that of the Apostles; and having, in many places, condemned them, for reasons almost equally affecting those of our Saviour and his immediate Disciples; his book is deservedly suspected of a Deistical tendency. His charging so many of the Fathers, without sparing even the Martyrs, with wilful lyes and forgeries, would have come better from the pen of a *Tindal*, or any other malicious Libertine, than from that of a Clergyman. To one who considers him as a Christian, his book can do little harm; and ought to do still less, where-ever he is believed to be a Deist; because, in that case, the solemn subscriptions and declarations, with which he hath imposed on the Church, and the ecclesiastical emoluments he enjoys by his prevarication, being considered at the same time with his principles, must, to every thinking mind, be a sufficient preservative against the infection of his books. With what face can a Deistical Doctor of  
Divinity



Divinity object a want of truth or sincerity to the Fathers, or to any man? What honest man will care to hear or read him, after his principles and designs are discovered? Or what man, of less art and learning, if he be not an idiot, will take any thing off his hands, without a clear irresistible demonstration?

*Temp.* Every one is ready to catch at the least appearance of an argument in favour of such principles as his heart hath espoused, before his head is thoroughly convinced of their truth: such books as this, wrote by the seeming friends of Christianity, contribute more to mend the pace of a willing reader in his progress towards Deism, than the works of a professed Deist.

*Shep.* Few will read them for any other purpose, be the intentions of those who write them never so good: however, performances of that kind are but helps to infidelity. Their admirers, if they have not something else to depend on, or were not Deists before they read them, are still but imperfect Libertines. They have, indeed, fairly broken the chain of religion; but, however, still drag some links of it at their feet, which make them *halt* ungracefully, as it were, *between two opinions*, and which none but the true Deist can knock off. The Libertine beast hath burst his fetters; but is still within the fences, which must be broken down, before he can range at large. A Clergyman, or one who professes himself a Christian, cannot handsomely do this for him; and therefore another, who can undertake it, and yet not act out of character, must be called to his assistance. If it so happens, that one who is prepared to enter on the last stage of *Self-sufficiency*, hath ne'er a Deist among his acquaintances to lend him an helping hand; he can, however, be at no loss, since there is a variety of books, so well penned for his purpose, and so judiciously adapted to the humour and capacity of every candidate for Deism, that, if he makes a proper choice, a few hours reading will be sufficient to finish what is wanting to one already so far advanced, and so very tractable. In one he will see Christianity attacked thro' its ordinances; in another, thro' its mysteries; in another, thro' its miracles; and in another, thro' its ministers. This will  
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draw him along with a regular chain of reasoning; that will lead him thro' a choice collection of miscellaneous quotations; and a third will entertain him with wit and humour, sufficient to put a thousand demonstrations out of countenance. But as a system, of some sort or other, may be necessary to settle his thoughts, and to ensure his principles, the infallibility of reason, the moral sense, the mortality of the soul, and God's indifference to all our actions, with many others, will offer themselves to his option.

*Temp.* Altho' the Deists reject no hypothesis that can be turned to their own advantage, or to the discredit of Christianity; yet every one singles out a favourite system, to which he is directed more by humour than judgment, and in which he rests satisfied, till the growth of his desires and passions calls for a scheme of laxer principles. It is just so, some naturalists tell us, that the cray-fishes, at a certain season, fit themselves with shells, which had been formerly cast off. Their choice is perfectly libertine; for they single out such as they think of a proper size for their purpose, and crawl into them backward, repeating the experiment, till they find themselves easy in some one or other of the heap.

*Shep.* Was it in that manner you entered into Libertinism?

*Temp.* It was even so, wrong-end-foremost; and my head was the last part of me that went in. There is nothing in the world I am more thoroughly convinced of, than that there is not one Libertine among a thousand who is not turned away from religion by his vices; and therefore I think that infinite conceit, which distinguishes them from the rest of mankind, altogether unaccountable. I assure you, Sir, my own, notwithstanding the great degree of pride, to which I am by nature addicted, astonished me, as often as I recollected the shameful passions that gave birth to my Libertine turn of mind.

*Shep.* Your surprize, that the Libertine should be the most conceited of all men, proceeds from your beginning to think at the wrong end of the business, and considering that as the effect, which is really the cause. A Deist

is not conceited, because he is a Deist; but a Deist, because he is conceited. It is somewhat originally within the man, that pre-disposes him to peculiar opinions. Surely it must have been some previous disposition, rather than reason, that made *St. Evremont* a Libertine, and *Pascal* a bigot (a), in the same country, and with an eye to the same religion. You know, Sir, that vanity, as well as lust or avarice, is a vice, which the *Self-sufficiency* of *Libertinism* is extremely well fitted to gratify.

*Temp.* You account exceedingly well for that which puzzled me so much.

*Shep.* Christianity is farther from tolerating pride, than any other passion; whereas pride and Libertinism mutually encourage and feed each other. The proud man will not be restrained, and the unrestrained grows yet prouder than he was before, when he compares his liberty with the bonds of others. This will appear to any man of sense, who peruses the Deistical performances, without a byass, either for, or against, their principles. Altho' (*Cornelius Agrippa* only excepted) there never was a Libertine who was also a conjurer, or set up for more wisdom than his own; yet they all pretend to such a full sufficiency of that, as no other sort of men can equal, nor any other being add to.

THE *Self-sufficiency* or Deism of Lord *Herbert* led the attack made on Christianity in *England*; and therefore the credit of singularity, and the glory of treading the yet unbeaten path, is intirely due to him. Our later Deists, who affect the same, have no sort of right to it. They do but follow and imitate. If no one had ventured before them, they would perhaps have been bigots, and some of them Papists, as long as they lived. This writer endeavoured to prove, that every man hath an innate idea of God, and his duty, so molded up in the very original make and constitution of his mind, as never to be defaced or obliterated; or, in other words, that

(a) *Pascal* declares, somewhere in his *Provincia! Letters*, that, in his opinion, no man can be saved, who does not die in communion with the Church of *Rome*.

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every man is born an able Divine and Moralist. We have already had occasion to examine the merits of this opinion, which Mr. *Locke* hath refuted to the satisfaction of every one who reads him. His Lordship, having laid down innate practical propositions, as the basis of his Theology, found himself obliged to write an elaborate apology for Paganism; an undertaking of so much difficulty, that it could never have been even thought of, but by one who adored his own, and despised his reader's understanding. Some of the Pagan extravagancies he endeavours to palliate by explaining them into allegories and symbols. The rest, which were a little too gross to be refined in his figurative alembic, he charges to the account of Priestcraft, and, in my opinion, very justly. But most assuredly no craft nor cunning could ever have established, almost throughout the whole world, such enormities both in principle and practice, had the mind of every man been enlightened with a right indeleble idea of God, and his will, impressed on the original frame of human nature, and essential to the soul of man.

*Temp.* This I am now fully convinced of.

*Shep.* You may observe, Sir, that, as the Christian religion was introduced into the world by men in the lowest rank of life, its great adversary, Deism, owes its origin, at least among us, to a man of quality. The contempt which poverty and ignorance always draw upon themselves, fell thro' the Apostles upon the religion they preached; whereas the honour and admiration, with which high birth and titles are revered, were derived upon Deism thro' the dignity of its author; and, what was likely to contribute more to its growth, than a thousand titles and estates, it had the advantage of his Lordship's great talents of learning, eloquence, and address, which were above his honours and fortune. Yet Christianity, notwithstanding its humble genius, and contemptible appearance, went faster up among mankind, and against the stream, than Deism, with all its pomp, and borrowed aids, went downward, altho' on a full tide of passion and corruption; for the Sufficiency of God is infinitely more powerful than the *Self-sufficiency* of man.



*Temp.* This, I think, is a very strong and obvious argument for the former.

*Shep.* There never lived a man before him, and but one after him, who was more self-sufficient than Mr. *Hobbes*. The dictator appears in his whole system, which hath the honour to be opposite to all the sentiments of all the Philosophers, Legislators, and Divines, that ever lived: and in the air of every paragraph; the stile and manner throughout being dogmatical and peremptory. Conceited people always affect singularity; and conceited writers, singularity of opinion and stile. Of all authors *Hobbes* is one of the most singular, as well in his manner, as his matter. His definition of reason, altho' formerly cited, is so pregnant an instance of this, that I cannot forbear repeating it. *Reason*, says he, *when we reckon it among the faculties of the mind, is nothing but reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon, for the marking and signifying our thoughts.*

*Temp.* Are you sure those are the words of the author?

*Shep.* The very words.

*Temp.* Well, it is indeed the strangest definition! and seems rather to intimate somewhat in arithmetic, than the thing it is put for. As I understand nothing of algebra, but that letters are used to mark certain supposed numbers, and as those numbers are signified by words, I fancy it is taken from thence.

*Shep.* Observe, he calls it a definition of the faculty of reason, whereas he says it is reckoning, which you know is an act. As far as it hath any sense in it, or is intelligible, so far it is false and absurd. He says in the same chapter, *The light of human minds is words, but by exact definitions first snuffed and purged from ambiguity.*

*Temp.* This is very diverting. Reason, then, which is the light of human minds, is but a word; and, when trimmed by the snuffers of his definition, is put out.

*Shep.* His definition of religion is singularly curious. *Religion is fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed.* These short sketches,

sketches, Sir, may serve for a taste of his singularity and conceit.

*Temp.* They are not very consistent with the high character of his understanding among the enemies of religion.

*Shep.* He was certainly a man of prodigious abilities; but eat up with vanity, and a desire to distinguish himself above the rest of the world by uncommon and surprising performances. His contempt for mankind prevented his being much acquainted either with them, or their works. It was by the fire-side, and from within himself, that he drew the plan, by which he proposed to new-model religion and politics. He must, no doubt on't, have made a most glorious figure among writers, had his vanity suffered him to employ his genius in the support of a possible system. But as he set himself to invent and defend one altogether chimerical, he appears weak and destitute of the great abilities he was actually cursed with, as a giant does, who attempts to heave a weight too great for his strength. His moral behaviour is free from blame, excepting in one instance of great dissingenuity. He wrote his *Leviathan* to serve the cause of *Charles the First*; but, having fled with others who followed the Prince into *France*, he grew tired of his banishment, and, turning his performance to the service of the opposite cause, made a merit of it with the Usurpers, in order to his safe return to *England*; nor did he stick to give this as his reason to Lord *Clarendon* before he left *France*.

*Temp.* When I read his book, I thought it calculated rather to be a prop to the arbitrary power pretended to by some Kings, than an encouragement to the insurrections of subjects.

*Shep.* It is so; but, before it was published, *Cromwell* had made himself master of more than the regal power; and so it served his purpose as well, as if it had been originally wrote at his request.

*Temp.* Notwithstanding this vile instance of his dissingenuity, no writer of that kind ever had so many disciples and admirers; which proves to demonstration the truth of what I have heard you sometimes observe, that

there are numbers who wish to be deceived, and with whom it actually recommends a Libertine writer to shew that he is a trickster.

*Shepherd.* **W**E have had a few rakes among us, such as Lord *Rochester*, Lord *Wharton*, and Mr. *Dryden*; of whom the first mistook his vices for Libertine principles; and the two last were so far of no religion, that they were ready to be of any. As they do not immediately relate to our subject, I shall take but a cursory notice of them. When the witty Lord *Rochester* sat down to burlesque the Scriptures, he looked on himself as a Libertine in theory as well as in practice: but he was mistaken; his vices had only amused, not convinced his reason; for the approach of death dissipated all the sophistry of his passions, and he found himself again a Christian.

*Temp.* This was natural. Opinions, espoused without reason, may be easily refuted without reason; and those principles, which youth, health, and gaiety, impose upon high spirits, for want of a solid foundation, give way to age, sickness, or fear.

*Shep.* Altho' a Libertine, for his own credit, and that of his book, may keep up a face of courage and chearfulness at the last, so many of them have been converted to Christianity by the near prospect of death, that great humbler of *Self-sufficiency*, that I fancy those, who died the hardest, and with all the outward eclat of Libertinism, were nevertheless inwardly frightened, and miserably distressed, to keep up the farcical grin in the last act of the tragedy. Lord *Rochester's* and Mr. *Dryden's* character represent to us a large class of men, who are led by their passions and debaucheries to make a jest of religion, without knowing all the time, whether they themselves have any religion or not, and without considering whether religion ought to be retained or rejected. They are, however, more ingenuous than the systematical Libertine, and can with a better grace tack about at the last, and put into port, as Mr. *Dryden* did into Popery, the shortest cut, and the most convenient for him, who strikes over from Libertinism to religion in the close of the evening.

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Lord *Wharton* afterwards imitated him in this, but not without a *French* pension; for he thought fit to have something in hand. *Blount* was not satisfied with dictating like a Philosopher, but gave responses, like *Apollo*. This *Delpbic* Gentleman published the oracles of reason, in which he and his friends inform us, that pleasure is the chief good; that God, and the human soul, are material; that the latter is mortal; that the world is eternal; that all things are governed by a kind of fate or necessity, with other the like extraordinary discoveries, which mankind were not well aware of before. Altho' this writer gives the name of oracles to the scattered papers, of which his book consists, yet he does not deal so much in ambiguities, as the other Deists; but exhibits to the world, in very intelligible terms, a Deistical confession of faith, which might have served for the basis of all disputes between them and us, had not the other Deists made some essential alterations in their system. This gentleman, however, is more to be commended than all the rest of the fraternity, inasmuch as he alone acts an open and ingenuous part. But, poor man! after having refuted the Christian revelation by his own, he at length unfortunately brought that into some discredit too; for, his oracle prompting him to solicit his sister-in-law to marry him, and her oracle forbidding the banes, he shot himself.

*Temp.* The world, I suppose, was unworthy of this superior being; and so he left it in an huff to return to his brethren the *Dii majorum Gentium*.

*Shepherd.* I HAVE spoken of the former Deistical writers but briefly, because they are little concerned in the present controversy with Christianity. I shall not, I hope, be tedious to you, if I dwell a little longer on some that are to follow.

*Temp.* By no means, Sir; I shall listen with the greatest pleasure.

*Shep.* You know the writer of the *Characteristics*, as a controvertist, is much echoed by all the Libertines; and, as a writer of taste and entertainment, admired almost to adoration.



*Temp.* In the latter capacity I cannot help still looking on him as a most polite and pleasing Author.

*Shep.* Perhaps it is my prejudice to his principles, that hinders me from regarding him in the same light. I am, I confess it, a very plain and blunt sort of a man. If, however, I observe as great a decorum in censuring even the politeness of a Lord, as his Lordship does in speaking of those he does not care for, I hope you will not expect more from a poor, clumsy, country Parson.

*Temp.* Were he to hear you himself, he could expect no more.

*Skep.* Were he to hear me with the same patience I read him, he would have no pretence to blame me for running backward and forward from point to point, like himself; especially as the confusion of his performances must unavoidably transfuse itself into every thing that can be said of him. This writer is full of encomiums on the beauty of universal benevolence, on the love of mankind; or of the species, and on the social virtues. He is all rapture, when he thinks of them. As he was particularly fond of painting, he hath, at the beginning of his works, given us that graceful figure, by which he would have the world form its idea of his face and person; and throughout all his writings he hath done little else, than present us with that beautiful portrait, by which he would recommend his mind to our admiration. But as he cannot conceal his industry for this purpose, so neither can an intelligent reader avoid observing, that all his refinement, all his delicacy, and all his parade about benevolence, flow intirely from vanity and affectation. His *Self-sufficiency* discovers itself, in spite of all his disguises, in a supercilious, dictating, declamatory manner, in a settled contempt for all who differ from him, and in a want of decent acknowledgements to *Cumberland* and others, from whom he poorly steals the gaudy feathers he flutters in. He would have his reader believe, that he first introduced into Philosophy the notions of moral beauty and deformity; for which, notwithstanding, he is beholden to *Cumberland*, and he again to *Plato*, *Cicero*, and other antient Philosophers, who had nothing oftener in their mouths, than the τὸ καλὸν καὶ γαθόν, the τὸ πρέ-

*nov* or *honestum*. He loves all mankind, and yet he praises himself, and becomes immeasurably satirical when he flouts at the Clergy, which he does twice at least, for once that his subject naturally admits of it. He dwells long on this good-natured topic, and takes in the whole order, without one exception, in his comprehensive encomiums. He is also excessively polite and delicate in the similitudes and other sentiments he employs for that purpose. A polemical controversy is a match at football, and the disputants are kickers and boxers; blows, outcries, foot, fist, adorn this description (*a*); which, after all, is really the highest piece of humour throughout the writings of his Lordship. Were we to pursue his elegant allegory, we might say, his Lordship kicks the controversial ball with a becoming fury, with a mien sufficiently rude. He elbows all about him, and drives the dirt up abundantly in his adversaries faces; and at length turns the play, which was not very delicate before, into a boisterous boxing-match. The Deists, who look on (to speak in his own sublimity of style) well-pleased to see the too cool and civil exercise changed to an entertainment more interesting, and likely to end in a more important defeat of the adversary, encourage their favourite champion with social shouts and huzzas, directing his hostile fist to the tender temple, or the unguarded stomach, of his antagonist. He, not forgetful of a long-practised art, entangles the arms of the adverse caity in his coat, and then, with a matchless adroitness, rekicking him on the yielding ham, flings him into the dirt; where having laid him, he beats time on his nose and eyes to the harmonious acclamations of the incircling mob. In his fifth Miscellany he is wholly taken up in commenting on his own works, particularly his *Rhapsody*, which he is far from vilifying. He allows little judgment or refinement to any of the *English* writers, excepting two or three Lords, *Buckingham*, *Roscommon*, &c. and almost the latter half of that long chapter is laid out on shewing how well he himself, and how ill the Clergy, who write for Christianity, succeed, especially in dialogue. He takes abundance of pains to represent

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(*a*) See the Characteristics, Vol. III. p. 15.

the Clergy as a formal, clumsy sort of people; and they may be so, for ought I can tell, who am so unpolished myself. However, if you will promise not to laugh at me, I will give you my idea of good breeding; and afterwards, if you should chance to think it not altogether amiss, examine his Lordship's behaviour, as a writer, by it.

*Temp.* I have seen enough of the world already, to make me sensible ill-nature and spleen can never consist with good manners.

*Shep.* Good-breeding, in my opinion, should have for its basis piety and virtue. It is true a man may be both pious and virtuous, and yet a clown; but, clown as he is, he will injure no man, and, considering himself as always in the presence of God, he will so act, as not to offend him, to whom his highest respect is due; he will, to the uttermost of his power, behave himself according to the relation he stands in to God, as well as man.

*Temp.* It is certain a thorough good behaviour ought to be regulated, chiefly in respect to the greatest person or being present. If a Gentleman at the King's levee should carry it with never so much decorum to others, this could not excuse his seeming regardless of the royal presence.

*Shep.* Nor would the ceremony of the place permit him to carry on a private quarrel with any other person in the chamber, at least in a language loud enough to be heard by his Majesty.

*Temp.* No, that would be an insult on the King himself.

*Shep.* A person thus awed by a sense of religion, will seldom or never suffer his passions to run out into wild or shocking excesses; by which he will reap this great advantage over other less manageable tempers, that while they frequently become intemperate or outrageous, or at least are observed to hold in their passions at the full stretch of the bridle, he keeps his seat with an unconstrained and graceful air, and wants infinitely less to make him a perfectly well-bred man, than he who hath nothing more than the mere exteriors of behaviour. A person thus qualified, with a moderate share of natural under-

understanding, and of intercourse among men of polite education, will soon acquire a competency of that accomplishment and address, which are expected from persons of his rank. If to this an unaffected humility, which, in my opinion, nothing can so well teach him, as religion, be added, he can hardly fail to be very agreeable.

*Temp.* I wish I could as fully reduce to practice your idea of good-breeding, as I can approve of it. But wherein hath the writer we are speaking of, acted inconsistently with this idea?

*Shep.* He every-where professes himself a Christian; and yet, on many occasions, talks of God, of Christ, of the Scriptures, and of the religion he declares for, not only in a strain of burlesque and ridicule, but with an air of open contempt, as may be seen in his second miscellany, where he is as free with Almighty God as with the prophet *Jonah*. If good-breeding can be founded on profaneness, his Lordship was indeed perfectly well-bred. But if a man, to be well-bred, must be virtuous; and if an open and honest sincerity is one of those virtues that have the nearest relation to true good-breeding; then his Lordship can have no better title to the latter than to the former; and what that is, will easily appear, if you consider, that altho' he talks finely of virtues and vices, particularly in his Inquiry concerning virtue, yet he says nothing of dissimulation there; and elsewhere gives reasons why himself, and others, who write like him about religion, are obliged to make use of it. He makes the whole of duty to arise from natural affection and aversion, and describes with abhorrence the object of the one, and with rapture that of the other; yet not only approves of, but practises, a base and disingenuous method of infusing his own opinions into the minds of his readers. Is there no deformity in such a practice? Is there no beauty in open and honest dealing by the understanding of others? Does reason, truly such, ever recommend any thing to us, the tendency whereof she is not at liberty to lay open, in order that the mind, to be instructed, may infer the truth, from the real utility, of her dictates? Surely it is a most preposterous way, that



of blind-folding a man in order to lead him to truth. Reason, right reason, hath no need to deceive. Can there be rational, any more than pious, frauds? What Priest, either *Roman* or *Egyptian*, ever used more fraud than he and his brethren, when they look our Saviour in the face, call him theirs, speak sometimes honourably of him, to avoid alarming his worshipers, and in the mean time labour sily to prove him an impostor? Were not *Judas* and his kins a type of these persons, and their practices?

*Temp.* I must confess I think such practices highly disingenuous.

*Shep.* And is not that which is highly disingenuous, very unbecoming a Gentleman, or a man of true good-breeding?

*Temp.* No doubt, it is; and, if made use of in religious matters, impious too.

*Shep.* I was going to say so. As to his good-humour, complaisance, and condescension, if barely recommending those amiable essentials of good-breeding to others, may denominate him well-bred, I must own he is highly so; but whether there ever were three volumes published, in which more arrogance in dictating, or more spleen and contempt in censuring, are demonstrated, than in his, and more to the life, I know not; they never came to my hands. It is a mark of ill-breeding to talk to ourselves, when others are present, because it shews we think highly of ourselves, and contemptibly of them. He also is esteemed ill-bred, who entertains his company with many or long discourses of himself. It is just so, however, his Lordship serves his readers. He talks of himself, and to himself, on all occasions, and swells intolerably when he does so. He lectures like a Lord indeed, and dictates with the disdain of one who is *self-sufficient*, and perfectly assured. To prefer others to one's self is that engaging article of good-manners, by which, with little or no other help, some people acquire the name of fine Gentlemen. But on the contrary, to prefer one's self to others, especially in point of understanding, is one of the grossest insults, and generally the most fiercely resented, of all the affronts that pride and arrogance can offer.

offer. Now his Lordship in this respect, as the inventor of a new system, as a man of refined taste, as a superior critic, as skilled in painting, sculpture, music, &c. runs out into shameless excesses, and sets himself above mankind. His vast parade of knowledge in these matters is for the most part wholly foreign to the subjects he handles, and favours strongly of conceit and pedantry. The enormous liberty he takes in impertinently digressing every now-and-then from the point under consideration, is nothing better than trifling with his reader. People of real good-breeding and discretion never wander far from the scope and drift of their discourse, when they are speaking to persons, for whom they have any respect; much less do they, like this Author, every moment give a loose to the extravagant sallies of imagination, impertinently burlesquing the lowest thoughts with an affected pomp of expression, in the midst of a philosophical disquisition. His Lordship is an enthusiastic writer by profession; but would have us think his enthusiasm polite and rational. Be this as it will, he takes flights sometimes, which *George Fox* himself need not have been ashamed of. If these rants and friskings of the fancy did either instruct or entertain a reasonable reader, they would not be justly chargeable with contempt for him and his time, both which are miserably trifled with in being obliged to accompany a roving imagination to the utmost distance from what is sought for, and back again, thro' round-about ways, and sneering apologies. There is another method, by which this writer, with a gross and disingenuous contempt for the understanding of his reader, imposes on his easiness. Being extremely afraid of answers, and desirous that his readers should be at one half of the pains to pervert their own principles, he affects obscurity on the plainest subjects; denies indeed dogmatically; but asserts so sceptically, or rather hypothetically, that neither his disciple, nor his adversary, know well what to lay hold of. When he finds himself in danger, he first bewilders the subject, then calls Christ his Saviour, throws in a word, perhaps, in favour of a future state, digresses to painting and taste, and then lets fly a most offensive volley at the Clergy, who press him, and drive

him to these shifts. His behaviour is, in this, exactly like that of the *Stink-bingzem*.

*Temp.* Pray what is that?

*Skep.* The *Stink-bingzem* is a wild beast about the size of an hare, and as unable to defend itself by strength, altho' a beast of prey. It infests the country about the cape of *Good Hope*. When it is in danger of being overtaken by the hunters, it lets fly, from behind, a blast of such a *Stygian* scent, as no living creature, that hath a nose, is able to endure. The dogs are immediately thrown out by too much smell, and the huntsmen retire to a distance, as fast as they can, while the delicate creature makes its escape, under the protection of its own atmosphere. In our last Dialogue I gave sufficient proof, that, altho' a Clergyman myself, I regard the Clergy only as they act up to the true character of their function: this, I hope, will satisfy you, that, when I take notice of his Lordship's behaviour to the Clergy, I do it not from any prejudice in their favour, but because I think his treatment of them ungenteel. To censure one man for the faults of another, which is always the case when large bodies of men are attacked at once, is so high a pitch of ill-manners, that it rises to a crime: for, surely, of all censures, altho' it levels not at individuals, it is the most unjust and cruel; and, altho' it is extremely comprehensive, it argues the narrowest heart, the most lumping and undistinguishing sort of malice. His Lordship, in the close of his last Miscellany, introduces a secular Gentleman, as he calls him, into a large company, which, by that distinction, appears to have been made up mostly of Clergymen, disputing with them about the possibility of uniformity in religion; which topic, however, is only used as an introduction and pretence to run down Christianity. This Gentleman is intended to represent the Author, which, indeed, he does most justly; for he is too full of himself to let his opponents say any thing, and artfully spatters the professed religion of the Author with the strongest arguments that Author could put into his mouth: after this, without the least provocation from the poor dumb creatures, he breaks out into harsh and splenetic invectives against the whole company, charging

charging them with fury, brutality, and want of breeding; and then, without giving them time to reply, shuffles away with an air of disdain. Here are good-breeding, humanity, benevolence, love of the species, moral beauty, and social affection, in an high degree! And here, Sir, is fine Dialogue, by way of example and illustration to all the criticisms his Lordship bestows on that kind of writing!

*Temp.* The proofs you give of his Lordship's disingenuity on some occasions, and roughness on others, escaped me when I read him, excepting that I thought him angry with the Clergy, which, indeed, I was far enough from regarding as a fault: but, I assure you, I do not now look upon him with the same degree of admiration.

*Shep.* As to what I was last speaking of, Pray, Sir, in case you had found out, that a certain person, dressed in a blue coat, was a scoundrel; would you ever afterwards tell every man you met in blue, even altho' in the largest companies, that he is a scoundrel? Would you advertise him such, in the public prints?

*Temp.* I could hardly be guilty of so great a rudeness and cruelty.

*Shep.* Change the colour, and suppose it black; will not the case be still the same?

*Temp.* Undoubtedly.

*Shep.* You have not seen *France* and *Italy* yet, I believe; nor are you, perhaps, an adept in painting.

*Temp.* No, indeed.

*Shep.* Suppose a Gentleman, of your acquaintance, should be perpetually telling you, that you are a clown; that you have no taste; that you are ignorant of painting; that you never travelled; but, at the same time, that he himself hath made the grand tour, is finely accomplished, and an excellent judge of poetry, painting, sculpture, music, &c, what would you think of him?

*Temp.* That he was really less a Gentleman than myself; and that his behaviour fully overthrew his pretensions.

*Shep.* What! altho' he could bow with a good grace, and carry himself with the mien of a man of quality?

*Temp.*



*Temp.* Those are but mere exterior accomplishments. The teachers of dancing, riding, pushing, &c. can no more make a truly genteel person, than a taylor can make a man: nay, the amplest fortune, and the most liberal education, are only helps for that purpose; and, when they are laid out on a mind and person not predisposed by nature to gracefulness and dignity, they only finish him a coxcomb. No one ever had true good-breeding, who was self-sufficient, and proud of his superiority over such as have not had the advantage of an education as genteel as his. He who affects to display his accomplishments, especially in the odious way of comparisons with plainer people, hath a weak head, that grows giddy even upon an imaginary elevation. The fine Gentleman never seems to think himself, nor takes any pains to make others think him, a fine Gentleman; but speaks himself to the world by an unaffected ease and *decorum*, in all his carriage.

*Shep.* So much for this author's politeness, who was so over-run with refinement and taste, that he sets up taste as a religion or moral rule of action for the great ones, while he leaves the ignorant and the vulgar to be governed by a belief of future rewards and punishments, which, he intimates, can be of no use to the liberal, polished, and refined part of mankind, such as himself, who, he says, are apt, through the whole course of their lives, to look upon such sanctions as mere narrations and tales; so far are they from the simplicity of babes and sucklings. These are his words, in the second chapter of his third Miscellany.

*Temp.* I remember them very well, and also my own satisfaction in espousing a principle that distinguished me from my own servants, and the vulgar part of mankind. It is diverting enough to reflect on the pleasant alteration this new substitute for Theology will make in the reasonings of such as shall become converts to it, and in the fashionable terms, with which they will be obliged to express their sentiments about it. As there is nothing, in which mankind are more divided, than in their tastes, infinite differences and disputes must needs arise in the sect of tasters. As we give the name of orthodox to that  
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which hath our assent and approbation, they will, on the like occasion, use the words polite, genteel, and elegant; and where we would use the term heterodox, they will express themselves by insipid, rustic, awkward, and inelegant. He who, among us, would be called an honest or upright man, will, by them, be esteemed a fine gentleman; and what we call knavish, or villainous, will, in their language, be denominated unmannerly, or clownish. What is new light among us, will be a new fashion among them.

*Shep.* To advance the credit of this new-invented religion for people of quality, he, in the same place, makes a jest of conscience, of hell and the devil, and afterwards turns them over to the mob. And is it, then, come to this, that we inferior folks must be confined to conscience, and a plebeian religion, while you Gentlemen of refinement are to be set at large, and at full liberty to regulate your lives according to your own inclinations and aversions? Since, by this scheme, the very souls of men are to be distinguished into two ranks, I wish his Lordship had appointed an herald, or a master of the ceremonies, to separate the souls of quality from the plebeian, the honourable from the conscientious souls, and to keep us in our places: not that I am afraid I shall be tempted to look upward for better company than he assigns me, but because I know a great many empty and conceited coxcombs, who, altho' descended of wealthy families, and refined by education and travels into foreign countries, and, of consequence, pretending to an exquisite taste; yet are as destitute of it, especially in his Lordship's sense, as their footmen. Now these, I know, will be for aping his Lordship, and swimming on the top, if there is no one to humble them to an apprehension of hell and the devil: besides, I cannot see how the man of quality can propose making his tour of taste thro' life, without a suitable train of both sexes, picked from among us lower people, who, upon our sneaking principle of conscience, cannot follow him a single step; and, as to taste, we are incapable of ever acquiring it. This noble author hath, indeed, nominated no herald, hath constituted no office to distinguish the slaves of conscience from  
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the followers of taste and honour; yet he hath not left the *beau monde* altogether exposed to the numberless pretensions to, and disputes about, a principle so vague and indeterminable in itself: for, having degraded reason and religion from the office of deciding questions about the fitness or unfitness of things, he hath set up ridicule in their place, by which the man of real taste may easily joke the coxcomb, who only pretends to it, into his proper place among us low wretches, who believe there is another world. His Lordship, however, had two other reasons for erecting humour into a criterion for so important a purpose: the thought is new and singular, and, as such, makes the most distinguished ornament of his book. Again, having, thro' all his former writings, made use of humour instead of reason, and jested his reader into a set of very extraordinary conclusions, lest any one should say it was too ludicrous an instrument for so grave a purpose, as the investigation of truths, of religious truths, being able to prove whatever he pleased, he proved a jest to be the best middle term in every question: so that his elaborate treatise, which he modestly styles, *An essay on the freedom of wit and humour*, justly merits the title of, *The jocular logic*. Parallel to this is another art made use of by his Lordship, unknown to former writers, but hereafter to be imitated by all. The common method followed before his time, in order to make a performance regular and coherent, was, first, to form an idea of certain rules for writing, and then to model the matter, and adjust the stile, to those rules. To have run in this old beaten track, would have looked too slavish, formal, and stiff, for so great a genius, who is as absolute a Libertine in criticism, as religion: he therefore ventured on a way more free and bold, first writing many of his treatises, without any rule at all; after this, he drew from these writings such critical rules, as might serve the purposes of all other authors; as *Aristotle* did the rules of *Epic Poetry* from *Homer*. Our Author's method (if we can call it so) may be termed, the obscure, or the desultory method, the patch-work, the ruff-raff, the hotch-potch, of the *Belles Lettres*. Having wrote a good deal in this way, he wrote almost

as much more to shew the excellence both of his method and execution, as also to correct and reduce the unpollished world to a taste for his new standard: thus one treatise produced another, and the example came before the rule. In like manner, as he had intermixed a world of flights and rants with his works, which, in a close inquiry after truth, and on controverted points, will not readily seem proper, to an ordinary reader, he shews, in his advice to an author, that this is an excellent ingredient in good writing: and, to support himself with an indisputable authority (an uncommon condescension in one who is wholly original, and above all imitation), he proves that *Plato's Dialogues* are Poems. As he had an incomparable talent at the obscure, he affects, professes, and defends it: as he never sticks a moment to any point, so he labours, in the defence of the rhapsodical and miscellaneous manner, in opposition to the methodical formality, used by the Clergy in their discourses. By these means the defects, as another would call them, of his Lordship's performances, being recommended by himself, as examples to his own rules, and patterns for imitation, are to become, for the future, the chief ornaments and excellencies of all other writings. That you may have all his book at once, and over again, when you read any part of it, he every-where refers you to himself, sometimes backward, and sometimes forward, by above three hundred marginal quotations. As his books are made up of a fortuitous concourse of paragraphs, this, and his large index, are the only cement that connects and methodizes his matter. An author who affects confusion, and digresses at such a rate as he does, may refer from any one place to any one place, being every-where, beginning, middle, and end. His Inquiry concerning virtue is, indeed, a regular, and well-digested piece, wherein the errors and absurdities of the Author come forward in rank and file, and so orderly, that the reader may pick out the drift, provided he gives a close attention. Nevertheless, if he compares what he says in one place, with what he lays down in another of that performance, concerning evil, and the belief of future rewards and punishments, he will find it no easy matter



matter to trace out his opinion. As he makes the distinction between moral good and evil, and the nature and force of obligation, to arise from the affections, he is obliged to separate the affections into two classes, the natural and unnatural; by which means the all-sufficient nature of man is, by his system, acquitted and discharged of evil, which, according to him, is foreign to us, and unnatural. But when this stroke of art comes to be closely considered, and compared with the nature of man, it appears, that the worst of men hath no passion or affection in him, which is not found in all men, and did not originally make a part of human nature.

*Temp.* Was our nature, then, originally evil?

*Shep.* By no means: but the evil we find in our affections springs not from any new additional affections; it only takes its rise from the perversion and corruption of the old, or natural. If all the unnatural affections, in his Lordship's catalogue, are examined, they will appear to make a part of our nature, and to derive their malignity wholly from excess, misapplication, and corruption: for the nature of a bad man is by no means enlarged, but only altered; and therefore, had not his Lordship been more studious of novelty than truth, he would have traced up moral evil to inordinate affection, rather than to unnatural or adventitious affections.

*Temp.* Pray be so good as to exemplify this by an instance.

*Shep.* He places envy among his unnatural affections; and yet, in all children, it is one of the first that makes its appearance; which could not happen, were it not natural, in our present state of corruption. Is not self-love natural to us?

*Temp.* It is.

*Shep.* Is not the best man apt to be uneasy, when he finds himself destitute of somewhat ornamental or pleasing, which he sees others in possession of?

*Temp.* I believe he may.

*Shep.* Does he not endeavour to acquire that possession, if he hath a probability of doing it, without injustice, or injury to any man?

*Temp.* He does.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* So far he is only acted by a natural self-love : but when he not only desires the good for its own sake, but that he may be on a level with the man in whom he admires it ; how do you call the affection he is then acted by ?

*Temp.* It is emulation.

*Shep.* Whence proceeds emulation ?

*Temp.* From a mixture of self-love and pride.

*Shep.* Is emulation a vice ?

*Temp.* I think not.

*Shep.* Pride, then, may be natural and unblameable in some instances ; may it not ?

*Temp.* I think it may.

*Shep.* But when the person, who desires the good he admires in others, instead of endeavouring to obtain the like himself by laudable means, feels an inclination to rob others of it ; and, being unable to do so, is filled with discontent and hatred ; what do you call him ?

*Temp.* I pronounce him envious.

*Shep.* You see, then, his envy proceeds from mere natural affections, which, by means of his inability, either to gratify or subdue them, become vicious and detestable.

*Temp.* I see it clearly ; and that his Lordship's distinction comes to nothing. Envy is, indeed, no affection, but only the perversion of two affections.

*Shep.* This Lord is much admired as a writer, whose sentiments are fine, and stile beautiful ; and, in many places, they certainly deserve it : he is, however, in the main, obscure, confused, desultory, and affected. There cannot, therefore, be a more improper writer for the hands of a young man, who would acquire a clearness of conception, together with a natural and elegant habit of expression ; because his beauties serve only to pass his enormous defects on the undiscerning reader. His performances, which convey an infinity of bad principles, of *self-sufficiency*, conceit, confusion, and affectation (a),

(a) *God-governed, Miraculize, Deity* in the abstract, as if it were a species, *in the cause of Deity, self-passions, Miracle-proof, cult* for worship. *Forming the Dual number* for dividing, in order to converse with, one's self, &c.

into minds as yet unformed, under the cover of superficial reasonings, and a glare of false wit, should be considered as lumps of poison, wrapped in leaf-gold; the covering thin, and the poison massy. All the young men, on whom the experiment hath been made, prove the truth of what I am here asserting: they no sooner read these books, than they become conceited, pert, and *self-sufficient*. Having little knowlege, and yet setting up for a great deal, they adopt his Lordship's expressions, and discover a world of affectation, so despicable and offensive, that one cannot converse with them, for half an hour, without pity and impatience. But well it were, if this was all; we find in them a foundation laid for infidelity, if not a superstructure already carried to the highest story, and a chanel opened for a torrent of impiety and vice to pour itself on the whole course of their future lives. It is more to be lamented, than wondered at, that his Lordship should be the favourite author of young men; for he was near their stage of life when he wrote, and therefore his gay and airy way is too conformable to their turn of mind, not to be highly approved of. Besides, he feeds their vanity, and gives them a loose, which they are much apter to make an ill use of, than he was. The feeble bridle of moral beauties and deformities, and a strong desire to prove to the world, that his principles were sufficient, might have kept so bookish, so speculative, and so sickly a young man, within some bounds: but it does by no means follow, that the generality of our youths, exposed to the most violent passions from within, and the most alluring temptations from without, stand in need of no other restraints.

*Temp.* Altho' his Lordship's writings gave me high notions of virtue, yet, I freely own, they did not, by any means, inspire me with a proportionable ardour to reduce them to practice. This did not a little recommend him to me as a writer; and, I verily believe, is with readers, such as I was, the greatest beauty in his performances, if not the very thing that makes such liberties and affectations please in him, as would disgust in an author of less soothing principles.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* Your confession is worth all my remarks.

**B**UT it is time to pass to another, whose stile and manner, being unworthy of notice, will not detain us; I mean *Toland*, who, being the natural son of an *Irish* Priest, was educated a Papist, afterwards turned Presbyterian, and then Deist: this pretender to scholarship was of a mean and despicable genius, without any one considerable talent but cunning; which, however, he made so dextrous an use of, that it served him for judgment, learning, and every other accomplishment; insomuch that he passed with many, in *Prussia* and *England*, for a man of letters, and, particularly, for a great linguist. He was sent over, by the fraternity of Deists on this side of the water, to propagate infidelity in *Ireland*, with appointments sufficient to support him in the rank of a Gentleman: he no sooner arrived in *Dublin*, than his zeal for so good a cause prompted him to too open an exposure of himself, and his principles; insomuch that, the Clergy of that city taking the alarm, he had the mortification, the very first *Sunday* after he set his foot on the *Irish* shore, to make one in an auditory, to which the preacher addressed a Sermon, filled, from beginning to end, with severe, but just invectives against him. Such treatment in his own country, you may be sure, could not but ruffle one who was among the foremost even of his own fraternity in conceit and *Self-sufficiency*. In his passion he kept no measures, but ran into such wild indecencies, as soon made him ridiculous, and forced him to return in an huff, before his money was out, or he had done any thing for it. After his return, having supped, by invitation, with a wealthy Deist, a spoon was missing: poor *Toland*, as it is said, was suspected of the fact by his brethren, not because they were conscious of better principles than his, but, probably, because he was needy, and an *Irishman*: after being thought capable of such an action, by his own Deistical friends, others cannot have an high idea of his morals: yet this person, despicable as he was, had a very important province committed to his pen by the club; it was no less than that of proving Christianity to be not mysterious;



sterious: in which, under pretence of defending revelation against the charge of mysteriousness, he set himself, with all his might, to prove, that God could never require the belief of a mystery, or a point too high to be accounted for; and then, with little more than mere assertions, and texts of Scripture, which he neither did nor could prove to be applicable to his purpose; he, by design, weakly shews, that nothing in the Gospel dispensation is now mysterious, or incomprehensible. Altho' he abounds with professions of the highest regard for Christianity, yet he labours hard to prove the first; but, as to the last, touches neither on the Incarnation, nor the Trinity; leaving our religion to answer, after all, for those and other mysteries, which he hath been at so much pains to prove could never be made objects of our faith by Almighty God. This author was under no necessity of endeavouring to write clumsily, or reason weakly, as is evident to any candid reader, who peruses that part of his performance, where he intends to be demonstrative. Were not all the other Deistical writers guilty of the same, or a like artifice, I should charge the spoon on *Toland*. He who, in the mask of a Christian, gets admittance into the minds of his readers, in order to steal away their principles of religion and honesty, not to enrich his own, but only to disfigure their minds; may, without a breach of charity, be thought capable of a theft, that puts something in his pocket.

*Temp.* That story of the theft is a very strange one. Was it not as natural to suppose some of the servants pocketed the spoon?

*Shep.* The honourable company were best able to judge whether a Christian servant, or a Deistical gentleman, was the most likely to be a thief.

*Temp.* True.

*Shep.* This worthy teacher of Deism, not foreseeing whether any of his ingenious brethren would honour his memory with an epitaph, wrote one for himself; in which his vanity, and bad *Latin*, outlive him; and in which, among other things highly panegyric, he tells the world he understood above ten languages.

*Temp.* Above! *Zyara*, Did he understand eleven, or not?

*Shep.* His epitaph, you see, is mysterious, altho' Christianity is not; but it was so long, that all he died worth was not sufficient to purchase him a tomb-stone large enough to contain it.

**P**RAY, Mr. *Templeton*, did you ever hear, that the Inquisition is established in *England*?

*Temp.* No, indeed.

*Shep.* Well, you will find it is, if you read over Mr. *Collins's* preface to his *Grounds*, &c. or else be forced to believe he wrote it for the meridian of *Rome*, or *Madrid*. He therein makes the most lamentable and bitter outcries for want of liberty to write or speak one's mind upon religious subjects. Till I saw this performance, I thought there had not been a country under heaven, where so great encouragement is given to books published against the established religion, as in this. The use he would make of greater liberty, were it granted him, appears by his use of that liberty, or rather indulgence, he had; which was nothing more than to introduce into the world another piece of knavery of the same kind with that of the despicable *Toland*. In his first chapter he asserts, that the New Testament is founded on the Old, or Christianity on Judaism; but does not so much as attempt to prove, that it is founded on nothing else: yet, as if this latter had been fully proved, he thinks he can totally destroy Christianity by shewing, that the only foundation he allows it is unsound. For this he hath a trick that is wondrously ingenious. He first labours to prove, that the prophecies of the Old Testament are, as applied in the New, to be understood only allegorically or typically: for this he calls in the authority of *Surenhusius*, and then mangles and abridges that writer's whimsical scheme for the allegorical interpretation, in his application of it to the particular prophecies cited in the New Testament, from the Old. By these means he makes that interpretation (according to him the best, or only interpretation) appear altogether absurd and ridiculous: yet, all this time, if you will believe himself, *Collins* is a Christian, and

and is at all this trouble merely for the good of Christianity. He carefully avoids taking the least notice, that Christianity is founded on miracles of its own in the writings of all Christian Apologists, as well as Judaism. Till, therefore, this latter foundation is destroyed, what I have here said in a few words, in order only to detect and expose his low chicane, is a sufficient answer to his whole book. The same author, in another celebrated performance, after giving us a definition of Free thinking (*a*), which fits nothing but the mere act of judging (for it contains no idea of *freedom*), recommends it as necessary to the acquiring knowlege of every kind, particularly of religion: having thus begun to trifle with the reader, he proceeds immediately to impose on him by an artifice, which one would hardly expect from so silly a beginning. He tells us, *the Bible contains a collection of tracts given us, at divers times, by God himself*; and insists, that, as it is the work of God, it must be wrote *with the greatest exactness*: yet he says, *there is not, perhaps, in the world so miscellaneous a book*; and endeavours to shew, that it is impossible to understand it, without vast knowlege in history, chronology, mathematics, physics, ethics, architecture, &c. from whence he infers the necessity of *Free thinking*, in order to the attainment of right notions in Theology, that is, in order to the distinguishing, from true religion, certain articles of faith contained in the Scriptures, which he does not expressly mention, but figures to us, with a little mixture of Popish superstitions, by some tricks of legerdemain. Having laid this foundation, he then endeavours to prove, that Christians have no better notions of God, and his attributes, than others; and that the Scriptures are corrupt, and unintelligible. All this is professedly done for the service of Christianity. Thus this Gentleman recommends *Free-thinking* by a most perfidious dealing, and leads his reader to a search after truth by a system of chicane and dissimulation.

*Temp.* Such mean artifices are altogether unworthy of a Gentleman, to say nothing of a champion for liberty, and a guide to truth.

*Shep.*

(*a*) See A discourse of Free-thinking, &c.

*Shep.* **L**ET us now turn our eyes to the great Apostle of Deism, who, in his last comprehensive work, hath exhausted what is said by all the other Libertine writers, and summed the whole force of their cause, infomuch that this book is become the Bible of all Deistical readers, I mean *Tindal*; in comparison of whom, *Toland* is but a pedant, *Collins* a sophister, and his Lordship himself a trisler. This great man gave himself a better opportunity of looking sharply into religion, and seeing its weak side; than Deists usually do. In the reign of *Charles* the Second he was a Protestant, in that of *James* the Second a Papist, and, after the Revolution, he conformed to the Church of *England*; which, for want of another Revolution, he was forced, in outward profession, to adhere to, during the rest of his life; yet not so scrupulously, but that he set himself to ruin that Church, and to destroy not only revelation, but, I may say, all religion, first by his *Rights of the Christian Church*, and afterwards by his *Christianity as old as the creation*. After doubling thus upon the scent, not of truth, but of his worldly interests, we are not to wonder at seeing the looseness of his principles, either in his books, or by his life and conversation. Whether he drew his dispensations from his Popery, or his Deism, I know not; however, he acted as freely as he thought, and exemplified what he wrote by what he did. His principles were not, like those of some other Deists, merely whimsical and speculative, but highly serviceable to the pleasing or profitable purposes, for which they were chosen. They cost him his conscience, and his character; and therefore, not to have turned them to some account, would have been ill-management. I shall not rake into the detestable particulars, which are still remembred by many, of whom some do, nevertheless, admire his writings, and adhere to his principles.

*Temp.* How can we conceive, that any rational creature should ever become the disciple of such a wretch?

*Shep.* It is easily enough accounted for. People at a distance from *London* and *Oxford* either never heard of his pranks; or, if they did, looked on them as only the inventions of Christians. As to those who knew full



well the life he led, and yet became his followers; it was, with them, far from being an objection to his principles, that they countenanced lewdness, and other vices, because no other principles could make them easy. Nothing so strongly recommended them to their liking, as to see their pleasing effects on both the fortune and pleasures of him, who had contended so strenuously for them in his writings.

*Temp.* You said, just now, that he aimed at the destruction of all religion: how does that appear?

*Shep.* In his *Christianity as old as the creation* he uses several arguments, which, if admitted, must end in downright Atheism. This the answerers of that book took notice of, and he never attempted to clear those arguments of the consequence.

*Temp.* Is it not agreed, that writers are not answerable for the consequences that may be drawn from what they publish?

*Shep.* If a writer is charged with such consequences as that mentioned, and neither refutes the charge, nor renounces them; it is then taken for granted, that the consequences made, from the beginning, a part of his intendment: but if that prayer was his, which by the public is ascribed to him; it shews he was not far from the Atheism of *Epicurus*. Since he therein expresses himself to this effect; "If thou art at all concerned for one so insignificant as I am, &c." and that which he is reported to have used, a little before his death, "If there is a God, I desire he may have mercy on me;" shew, he was within an hair's breadth of Atheism, at the time when men are apt to discover all the religion they have. Both, however, serve as a key to his life and writings.

*Temp.* Some people take his last work to be a defence of Christianity against the objection, that it came too late into the world.

*Shep.* It passes, at first, on the ignorant reader, under that notion; but, as he proceeds, he finds Christianity refuted by that very objection which the Author urges as his chief argument against our religion.

*Temp.*

*Temp.* And so, altho', in the title-page, *Christianity* is as old as the creation; in the body of the work its antiquity is shortened by four thousand years.

*Shep.* Yes; and that which is juggled into the place of it, and christened with its name, is the religion of nature.

*Temp.* That religion, I suppose, which made the Author so good a Christian.

*Shep.* Even that. Here the sharper shews himself in the writer so plainly, that his readers must share largely in the merit of imposing on themselves, before they can become proselytes to opinions, that stand in need of arts, like these, to recommend them.

*Temp.* **T**HAT scheme of Libertinism, which complements human nature with *Self-sufficiency*, and turns its best side outward to a superficial observer, is, in my opinion, as well as yours, a flat contradiction to common experience: but I long to hear your remarks on the *Fable of the bees*, which represents mankind as a sort of devils, and makes vice the spring of every thing they do, not excepting their best actions. You will own, I believe, that vanity and *Self-sufficiency* could not have dictated so severe a satire on the whole human species, and, of consequence, on the Author himself.

*Shep.* I am very far from owning any such thing, since, if I did, the whole work itself would contradict me. The writer does not so much as pretend to be of a different make from all other men, whom he represents under the influence of vanity, as the first mover of all they think, or do. When this book was penned, *Self-sufficiency* had, in a greater or less degree, taken possession of all the writers and readers among us. What principle, therefore, could *Mandeville* have defended, that would have given him so high an air of singularity, as the one he chose, and yet, at the same time, have shewn his contempt for religion? If *Hobbes* had not lived before him, he must have even carried off the credit of an inventor. Of all the writers on the side of infidelity, this had the greatest stock of wit and experience: his style, indeed, is a little lumpish; but it is clear and

strong. The eloquence of *Ulysses* is, in *Homer*, compared to a shower of snow; but that of *Mandeville* is like a shower of stones, that flattens all the inclosures of virtue, and leaves a frightful face of ruin behind it. *Shaftesbury* labours to prove mankind, of whom he knew but little, benevolent, public-spirited, and, by nature, good. *Mandeville* takes as much pains to prove them the reverse of all this. These authors both attack Christianity, but from quite opposite quarters, and on contrary plans. A Christian may leave them to shoot wide of what they aim at, and hit one another; but a Libertine, who hath a ready faith for any thing that promises to rid him of a troublesome religion, gives often as full an assent to both, as a Libertine hath to give, and serves himself with the arguments and sneers of both. All things are right and true, altho' never so repugnant to one another, that help to hunt from his conscience such an inmate as Christianity. These allies of his, enemies as they are to each other, are called in to combat the present invader of his repose and pleasures: and although, when the victory shall be obtained, and religion banished, he can never reconcile them; yet he knows well enough how to keep them quiet, having room in his capacious mind to billet contradictions at such a distance from one another, as to prevent their interfering and jarring at any time. In most controversies, truth is on one side or other, or, at least, in the middle; but in this, between *Shaftesbury* and *Mandeville*, it is really no where: men are not what either represents them. We are not to thank the mere nature of man, whether good or bad, but somewhat of a more excellent and beneficent disposition, for the assistances and services we receive from man. If all the good, that is done for the pure abstracted love of virtue, were separated from that which flows from other motives, it would not be sufficient to set up one truly honest man, not to say a Saint, or an Hero, much less a whole species of Heroes: and as to the good that is done by vice, it can be no argument in favour of vice, the natural tendency of which is only evil; but shews the wisdom of God, who hath so constituted the nature of man, and of the

the world he hath placed him in, that good results, at last, even from evil itself.

*Temp.* I never thought these two writers so opposite : for if the Doctor tells us, that *private malefits* are *public benefits* ; the Peer maintains, that particular evil is general good.

*Shep.* It is true : but why, then, doth the Doctor attack his Lordship with so much animosity ?

*Temp.* I really don't know.

*Shep.* It was because they entertained a quite opposite opinion of mankind, and each founded his peculiar system on his own opinion of the species ; which opinion, because it was a favourite, he thought he could not possibly indulge too much, or carry too far.

*Temp.* You have, to my great satisfaction, laid open the peculiar artifice of each Libertine performance, hitherto taken into our consideration : but, pray, what is the trick, or stratagem, of the *Independent Whig* ? That performance abounds with very emphatical professions of love, and even zeal, for Christianity ; contains little or nothing, at least that I could observe, of Deistical principles ; and seems to meddle with hardly any thing else than the vices of the Clergy, which it labours to reform : a design, in my opinion, truly laudable ; and, considering the times we live in, neither unseasonable, nor unworthy the pen of a Christian writer. It is true, the writers of these papers lash the Clergy with excessive acrimony : but this seems purely the effect of an over-heated zeal for Christianity ; since, towards the beginning of that work, they speak of your office in terms full of respect and affection, and, contrary to the usual practice of Libertines, distinguishing the good Clergy from the bad, profess as high a regard for the former, as disesteem for the latter : but what contributed more than all this, to convince me of their zeal and hearty attachment to our religion, is, their declaring, that Libertinism did not arise from any want of evidence in favour of Christianity, but from the ill lives of the Priests ; and that a good and truly pious Ministry might, with the greatest ease, extirpate that poisonous plant, notwithstanding its having spread so far, and struck its roots so deep.



*Shep.* There is no one thing in the world that better suits with a rational and religious mind, than a calm dispassionate endeavour to trace up whatsoever happens, tho' never so seemingly evil in its nature and tendency, to a wise design, or, at least, permission, of Providence. I have often considered the book, you speak of, in this light. As we have little or no discipline to regulate the behaviour of the Clergy; as the friends of that order are too tender to chastise and expose the unsounder part of those who fill it; and as those among us, who have some regard for religion, have yet more for their own safety, and their worldly views; such books as the *Independent Whig* might be of singular use, if duly attended to by the Clergy; for altho' in some places they ridicule what is right and good, in others they scourge our real errors and enormities. The just Providence of God, since we will not exercise a due discipline on ourselves, lays on us the severer discipline of our enemies, in letting loose such performances against us, which in part answer ends more agreeable to the Divine permission, than the intention of their writers.

*Temp.* You look upon the authors of this work then, as enemies to our religion?

*Shep.* Friends never reprove with bitterness like theirs; and therefore we may be sure the reformation of those they rail at and ridicule, makes no part of their intention. If they bestow encomiums on a few of the Clergy, it is but to gain credit, with undiscerning people, to their professions of zeal for Christianity, and to the invectives with which they load the rest. These invectives and reproaches, thus gilded, go glibly down with numbers who are yet Christians, and fill them with a too general distaste for the Clergy. Hence arises a settled disinclination to their advice, as well public as private; which keeps them at a distance from both, and at the same time lays them open to the poison of Libertinism, infused by the books and conversation of those, who by degrees, and artfully, altho' a little more openly, insinuate their arguments against Christianity. Thus these men of candour cover what they utter against the Clergy in the bitterness of their souls, under specious protestations of regard for

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our religion, and labour in the support of Deism against that religion by prejudice alone, while they leave the argumentative part of a work, so base and disingenuous, to others, who wear a thinner mask.

*Temp.* Such, I must own, hath been the effect of the performance under censure; but how doth this appear to have been the design of its authors?

*Shep.* Do you know who those authors were?

*Temp.* I do.

*Shep.* Were they not known to be Deists?

*Temp.* They were generally so reported.

*Shep.* Did not some of them, particularly *Collins*, publish distinct treatises against Christianity?

*Temp.* They did.

*Shep.* What interpretation, then, are you to put on their warm professions of zeal for Christianity? Can you imagine such persons had a real intention to promote its credit by a reformation of the Ministry, the very greatest service that could be rendered it?

*Temp.* How necessary a thing it is to the happiness of mankind, that such detestable deceivers should be unmasked to the whole world!

*Shep.* A further proof of their bad intentions may be gathered from that very observation of yours, on which you founded your too favourable opinion of them, namely, their distinguishing between the good and the bad Clergyman. Who is their good Clergyman? *Phydelius*, that vain-glorious patronizer of dissensions, and erroneous doctrines, so cried up by men like himself, for his artful writings against all his solemn subscriptions and declarations. And who is their bad Clergyman? The Bishop of *Man*, than whom no age of Christianity, nor of the world, hath ever produced a more faithful and exemplary Pastor, nor a more upright man. To have run down the one, and applauded the other, is a sufficient key to the designs of these authors, and may serve for a refutation of their whole performance, till it shall please God to give it a full answer in an intire reformation of the Clergy. In the mean time that Clergyman best repels the poison of this chicaning book, who lives and acts as a Clergyman should do. All other Cler-

gymen, altho' they should write ten thousand volumes against it, do but exhibit to mankind a confirmation of what is urged therein; do but argue on the side of its authors, and shamefully publish to the world a new edition of this attack on Christianity, in their own conduct. *The Independent Whig* shews his aversion to Christianity by what he says against fasting. He is indeed as much in the right, as a Deist can be, to ridicule that, and all other acts of mortification. Our passions keep pace with our blood, that with our appetites, and those again with the greater or less degree of indulgence shewn them. Now the appetites, and, if mortification do not prevent it, the passions of all men, are more or less excessive, thro' natural corruption or habit; and consequently call for different degrees of strength and activity in the governing principle, which is reason; but reason without religion, or both without mortification, are too weak to subdue the passions, especially in ranker constitutions. The gratification of our desires and passions being attended with pleasure, religion, and whatsoever else restrains that gratification, must be in some degree distasteful to our corrupt nature, and the more, as the passions and appetites are stronger. Mortification therefore not only aids religion, but helps to abate or remove the reluctance of nature to religion. It is for this reason that a Deist, as such, must be an enemy to mortification; for the grand inducement to *Libertinism* is sensuality, or love of pleasure; but that inducement loses as much of its force in a person subdued by mortification, as it does in one debilitated to the same degree by sickness. Hence it is, that all Libertines, and the *Independent Whig* among the rest, represent it as a churlish sort of sin, to refuse at any time the good creatures God hath provided for us, out of which they never except the artificial and provocative articles of luxury. This they do, in order to induce their disciples to a free and unstinted use of meat, drink, ease, and softness. As soon as, in obedience to these soothing lessons, the appetites have laid in a sufficient store, the passions immediately grow high and hot; and then religion must talk nonsense, or tell lyes, if it preaches up abstinence from the allurements of an harlot,

¶c.

*Ec.* as a necessary duty; or says, that abstinence in eating and drinking is any help to abstinence from lewdness, or a means of preserving us humble, meek, and patient. Whatever reason religion may have to call in the assistance of fasting and mortification, irreligion hath the same for objecting to them. It is certainly far from being a thing indifferent to the dispute about religion, whether it is at any time a duty, or a point of prudence, to deny ourselves whatsoever our desires may demand, and our fortunes give us.

*Temp.* I perceive the artifice of this performance lies very deep, and conceals a vast magazine of mischief at the bottom. However, fasting, which is against nature, and may be prejudicial to health, cannot surely be acceptable to God.

*Shep.* Not in itself, nor for its own sake, but only as it tends to subdue our inordinate affections, and render us more amenable to his laws; which, by a discreet management, it may do, without in the least impairing the health of such, as stand in need of it.

*Temp.* I must confess, Mr. *Shepherd*, I have no great idea of its efficacy for that purpose. How can mere bodily applications or expedients work a change in the passions, which are mental and internal?

*Shep.* Our passions and affections are purely animal, and, being placed, as it were, between the soul and body, become the medium or instrument, by which the spiritual and corporeal part of our nature mutually act and re-act upon each other. When these instruments have too much energy of their own, the springs of thought and action are wound too high; from whence proceed violent perturbations in the mind, and often dangerous disorders of the body, by which both health and virtue are impaired. Now it is found by experience, that the passions and affections draw their fuel thro' the body, from the quality and quantity of its nourishment. It is with us in this respect, as it is with other animals; high-feeding exalts our passions, and abstaining reduces them. Pray, Mr. *Templeton*, have we not our bodies and passions in common with the brute creation?

*Temp.* We certainly have.



*Shep.* What rule do you observe in feeding your horses?

*Temp.* I keep them pretty high in flesh.

*Shep.* Not so high, I suppose, as to tempt them to run away with you?

*Temp.* By no means.

*Shep.* No, you only give them provender sufficient for strength and activity; but you go no farther; for you do not wholly trust either to the strength of your bridle, or to your own skill in keeping your seat. But why do I talk of horses? Many of us seem to borrow our passions from bears, tygers, and lions, rather than from more manageable animals.

*Temp.* Nothing more true!

*Shep.* The keen appetites of such men are perpetually at work to pamper their passions. Earth, air, and sea, are ransacked for articles of luxury; and those things, that are in themselves too high for common food, must be raised still higher, before they can come up to their palates, by seasonings and sauces, which it is the business of an art more extensive and refined, than the Mathematics, to prepare for them. To a meal, consisting of ingredients thus fitted for the purpose, they sit down, before the last is half digested; and, having eat as long as they are able, spend the remainder of the day, and sometimes the night too, in swallowing great quantities of the highest wines, or other inflaming liquors. All this, however, would be but a tasteless entertainment, were it not seasoned with soft music, wanton songs, libertine conversation, and flattery: In what a condition, think you, are their passions, after having been thus regaled?

*Temp.* I have made the experiment too often on myself not to be sensible of its effects.

*Shep.* In such a case each passion is seized with a distemper peculiar to itself. Pride is swelled to phrensy; anger is inflamed to madness; lust is putrefied with a leprosy. Consideration, in the mean time, snorts itself to death in a lethargy; conscience languishes in a deep palsy; and reason, the glory and boast of man, the lord and governor of human nature, hath nothing else to do,  
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but to contrive a better dinner for to-morrow, to look out for other articles of sensuality, on which the passions, thus enraged, may be employed, and to hunt for such principles, as may countenance that employment. If the person, prepared in this manner for mischief, is only in a private station, an hundred, or a thousand wretches, are all that can suffer by him; but, if he is a King, his own, and all the nations bordering on it, must expect to be visited with the sword and slaughter. Human blood must furnish sauce to his dishes; and the cannon, together with the groans of dying men, must supply music to his meals. The pride and ambition, the lust and cruelty, of such men, may be all traced to their tables, and found, as in their seeds, among their dishes and bottles. Now, Sir, invert the supposition; let men be temperate at all times, which to an epicure is, I own, a continual fast. But if this treatment of their passions is too gentle to subdue them, and they are still in danger of relapsing into riot and sensuality, let them go farther, and on some occasions, fast, and mortify their affections: may not a cool head, and governable passions, be expected? Don't contrary causes produce contrary effects? And will not a mind, in this calm and dispassionate disposition, be better able to steer its way to truth, to religion, and devotion, than in the midst of such a storm as that we have been describing? By this time you may see the reasons, that induced the authors of the book we are speaking of, to write against fasting and mortification.

*Temp.* I see them; I feel them; and condemn myself of folly for not having been sooner sensible of them.

*Shep.* Among all the books wrote either for or against religion, this is one of the most superficial, and therefore the best adapted to a shallow reader, who hath not literature enough to be caught with artful quotations, nor sufficient understanding to be imposed on by an appearance of reason. It is made up of bitter words, flashes of wit, and smart reflections; by which it is qualified to carry down irreligion to the meanest capacities, to turn the slave into a Libertine, the fool into a witling, and set a sort of edge on minds too dull and stupid to be sharpened, but in the way of profaneness. Having

dwelt sufficiently on this performance, it is time to call another. Pray, Sir, have you read *Woolston* on the miracles of our Saviour?

*Temp.* I have, and will save you the trouble of remarking on a wretch beneath all criticism. When my admiration for Libertine writers was at the highest, I looked in his performance with contempt. His pitiful trick of refuting the miracles, under pretence of allegorizing them, is so stale and barefaced, his stile so low and rude, and his attempts to reason so absurd and senseless, that I could not help looking on him as a very despicable fellow, who was on the shift for bread.

*Shep.* Yet, as he had been more impudent and indecent than the rest of the Deistical writers, he past for an hero among his own tribe; and his picture, I am told, found a place in the closets of some very great personages.

*Temp.* **E**NOUGH of him. I am impatient to hear your remarks on *Christianity not founded on argument*; a performance that contributed more to my being a Libertine, than all the other Deistical writings.

*Shep.* It is indeed more artfully executed than the rest: its sophistry is deeper; and the humour, which is remote and delicate, seems, at first sight, rather to be suggested by the weak side of religion, than to proceed from the industry of the writer. The matter of this performance is said to have been clubbed for by *Tindal's* disciples, a set of men whose debaucheries and blasphemies would have rendered them infamous in any other age or country but their own. As to the artifice, on which it is planned, it consists in pushing the arguments of Divines concerning the deficiencies of reason, and the necessity of Divine revelation and grace, to the utmost extremity, that the reader may think it impossible to be a Christian without shutting his eyes, and shaking hands with reason and common sense. To this end, the texts of Scripture that set forth the necessity of God's assistance in order to saving faith, and a good life, are much insisted on; and such as strongly recommend the use of our senses and reason in judging of religion, are kept out of sight. The truth

truth is, human nature, in order to its becoming effectually religious and virtuous, requires two things; the one, that reason should be convinced; for which purpose, prophecies, miracles, and arguments, are made use of; the other, that the will should be inclined, in which consists the peculiar office of grace. Reason cannot be convinced, nor faith excited, without arguments; nor will arguments do either, unless they are attended to by a mind unbiassed. God's Holy Spirit alone can take off the universal bias against religion, that lies on the corrupt and sensual minds of all men, and produce in them an attention to the arguments in favour of religion. Hence appear distinctly the respective offices of reason and grace, in order to an effectual faith; and hence may be easily understood and explained whatsoever is said in Scripture, when the former is appealed to, or the latter said to be necessary, before we can believe any otherwise than as the devils do. Attention is necessary to conviction, and grace to attention; and whereas, after the reason of a man is thoroughly reconciled to religion, he may still continue wicked, so that his conviction shall only serve to condemn, not reform him, it is evident, that God's assistance is here also necessary to apply his conviction to his will, to press it home upon his passions, and to give life and vigour to his faith.

*Temp.* There is one thing, on which a great part of that book is made to depend, that seemed clearly to establish his main point, concerning the necessity of abdicating reason intirely, in order to our continuing Christians, after having been educated in Christianity. He says, the Scriptures make it highly criminal to apostatize from the faith, or even to doubt; and he further says, what I think cannot be denied, that no one can fairly examine into principles, while he continues prejudiced in their favour. From hence, I think, it clearly follows, that no man, educated a Christian, is at liberty, when he comes to the use of reason, to inquire effectually into the grounds of his faith; and yet, without such an inquiry, what he believes may as well be an absurdity, or a falshood, as a truth; which seems to make the faith of a Christian a very precarious thing.



*Shep.* Pray, Mr. *Templeton*, can a man lay aside, and wholly divest himself of, a preconceived opinion, without reason?

*Temp.* He cannot.

*Shep.* It is impossible, therefore, for any man ever to change his opinions.

*Temp.* How is that?

*Shep.* Why, he cannot examine his former opinion, without first laying it aside; and he cannot lay it aside, and become neutral, without first candidly considering the arguments against it, and suffering them to preponderate.

*Temp.* This indeed runs the argument to a contradictory circle, and I know not what to say to it.

*Shep.* Let this argument of our Author, thus levelled at Christianity, be tried on Deism, and we shall quickly see its fallacy. Be pleased, Sir, for a moment to take on you the person of a Deist, and you will soon know what to say.

*Temp.* I will.

*Shep.* As you are already a Deist, you cannot fairly examine the truth of Deism, if you do not first cease to be a Deist.

*Temp.* I own, I cannot do that, before I hear the arguments against Deism, and am convinced by them.

*Shep.* But you cannot be convinced by them, altho' they are never so strong, if you continue under your Deistical prejudice; therefore that must be cashiered previously to the examination of those arguments.

*Temp.* The thing is plain. Pray whence arises this embarrassment?

*Shep.* From setting out on a wrong principle. All Libertines lay it down for a maxim, and others too readily grant it, that it is impossible for a man candidly to examine his prejudices, without first laying them aside, and becoming perfectly neutral, or indifferent to his former opinions.

*Temp.* It will be hard to make me doubt the truth of this maxim.

*Shep.* You will quickly perceive it to be a downright fallacy.

fallacy. Are you of opinion that cane in your hand belongs to you?

*Temp.* I am.

*Shep.* But as two canes may be very like each other, it may possibly be mine; will you give a fair hearing to the arguments, on which I build my claim to it?

*Temp.* I will.

*Shep.* Yet you are still strongly of opinion it is yours.

*Temp.* I am indeed, and will keep possession till the contrary shall be made appear.

*Shep.* In this instance, Sir, altho' you retain your opinion in its full strength, yet you are qualified to judge, as an honest man should do, whether that opinion ought to be persevered in, or the reasons of my claim yielded to.

*Temp.* The force of what you say is not to be resisted. An honest mind, altho' still attached by prejudice to an opinion, or by self-interest to a property, may nevertheless decide in either case with candour.

*Shep.* Yes; but the arguments that prevail on him to quit his attachments, must have more apparent strength in them, than those attachments, which in a disingenuous mind they seldom have; and therefore such minds are very unfit judges in all questions concerning their own opinions or claims.

*Temp.* **Y**OU do not intend, I hope, to finish your criticisms, before you give me your sentiments of the *Moral Philosopher*, and the posthumous works of Mr. *Chubb*.

*Shep.* You was much in the right on't to join these together; for it was but one spirit, precisely one kind and degree of vanity, that taught them to wrangle and scribble themselves out of the religion they were educated in, and this by steps so parallel, that they seem to have been tied to each other by the same yoke, and driven down the miry path to Deism by the same evil genius. What gives them still a greater resemblance, is, that they attack religion from the same battery, discharge against it the same arguments (only *Chubb* is a little more particular), make their approaches by the same winding trenches,

trenches, and work under its foundations in the same mine. They are both very good Christians; yet maintain, as all other Libertines do, that the Church hath in all ages departed from the simplicity of Christ's religion; and that the very Evangelists and Apostles misunderstood their Master, and knew little of him, or his doctrines. They allow him the character of a Teacher sent from God; nay, the *Moral Philosopher* goes so far as to insist on the absolute necessity of revelation (a); but at the same time they both labour to prove, that the revelation made by Christ neither was, nor could be, of any use to mankind.

*Temp.* Most preposterous! Was a revelation necessary? Did God actually make one? And was it so distorted and perverted by the very persons, thro' whose hands he chose to convey it to us, as to disappoint the intention of God, and deprive the world of all the benefit proposed by it?

*Shep.* If you look on the authors under consideration, as Christians, no dreams, no reveries of a madman, can be more wild or monstrous, than their performances. But if you believe them to have been Deists, the inconsistency you are so much surpris'd at, will vanish into a stroke of art; and what you took at first for gross folly, will appear to be sheer knavery. If men, as Christians, as the most refined and reasoning Christians, like these ingenious writers, who pare Christianity to the quick, are, after all, in explaining or defending it, forced to run into palpable absurdities and contradictions, and talk like fools on the best hypothesis of revelation; what will follow, but that revelation itself must be an absurdity? This artful piece of folly serves to save appearances with undiscerning and illiterate Christians; and gives those who schemed it an opportunity of sliding into the minds of such readers, and there confounding the fundamental principles of religion with such doubts and perplexities, as it requires more candour and good sense to clear up, than fall to the lot of those who are most apt to entertain themselves with books of this kind. The author of the *Moral Philosopher*, as I have been told, made the tour  
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(a) See the *Moral Philosopher*, p. 144.

of all opinions relating to religion and physic; and, having found little else than prejudice and nonsense every-where, threw new light, in great abundance, on both those branches of knowledge. What his skill in correcting the Ethics of the learned world was, we expect to find on reading his *Moral Philosopher*; but upon looking into it, we are surprised to find it contains nothing more than a refutation of all that, which not only the Divines, but even the Apostles, took for Christianity. This we find dictated with so superior an air of sufficiency and authority, as may well serve, instead of weighty arguments, to convince us, that the author knew a great deal more of our religion, than those who were instructed in it immediately by God himself. As for Mr. Chubb, if ever any man was inspired by himself, it was he; for surely no man ever dictated from the fulness of himself with so high an air of authority, or by so happy a management made his bare assertions pass for convincing arguments.

*Temp.* My curiosity, to see what an illiterate person could say on a learned controversy, made me one of Mr. Chubb's readers; and, believe me, I did not think him by any means inferior to the other writers on either side of the question, excepting in style and method.

*Shep.* Did you not find yourself furnished in his writings with an excellent gradation of systems, one leading you still deeper than another into Libertinism?

*Temp.* I did, and observed, that while *this Chandler* of new lights was writing his way to Deism, he retailed to his readers a large parcel of lucubrations, out of which all sorts and sizes of Libertines may furnish themselves with new systems, and spruce opinions, that sit as easy on their consciences, as his gloves did on their hands (a).

*Shep.* Notwithstanding the air of an original, which he is very studious of affecting, he borrows largely from others; and in his posthumous works particularly, is so full of the trite reflections, and trivial cavils, often canted up by other Deists, and as often solidly refuted, that nothing can be more ridiculous, than his attempt to palm them on the reader for new discoveries of his own, or for

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(a) He was first a Glover, and then a Tallow-chandler.



unanswerable objections. It is certain these performances have much the look of *Chubb*; yet there is so great a conformity between the matter contained in them, and the heads published with the proposals for printing the posthumous volume of *Christianity as old as the creation*, that some are of opinion these are the posthumous works of *Tindal*, and not of *Chubb*, but so dressed up indeed in *Chubb's* manner, as to give them the sanction of his more reputable name. Be this as it will, it is no small advantage to them with the gross of their readers, that they seem to be the productions of an illiterate author.

*Temp.* I must own I think them surprising performances for a man, who could only read and write.

*Shep.* You are not singular in this. If, however, a man will lay out the greater part of his life in reading and writing on one particular subject, and confine himself to his mother-tongue, he cannot choose but gather matter, and acquire an habit of uttering it in as elegant a style, as that of Mr. *Chubb*, altho' his talents are not of the first rate. Many women, without taking half the pains he did, both think more justly, and deliver themselves in a much better style; but it passes for no wonder in them, because they think it (and no doubt it is) a more rational way of spending their time in knotting, or making an housewife, than in starting difficulties and quirks to puzzle the minds of mankind, or in working up old shreds of Libertinism into new Deistical books.

*Temp.* Did not *Chubb* pass for a sort of Christian during his life-time?

*Shep.* He did. It is true, his Christianity was of his own making. He approved of no writings in the New Testament. He disliked the Gospels least; yet was so much out of humour even with them, and thought the Evangelists either so ignorant of the history they undertook to write, or so dishonest towards a religion they staked their lives on, that he was forced to turn Evangelist himself, and publish a new Gospel of his own, which, in contradistinction to theirs, he modestly intitles, *The true Gospel of Jesus Christ*.

*Temp.*

*Temp.* I am not much acquainted with that performance. Pray from what antient records does he draw the materials of his new Gospel, I mean, when he ventures to differ with the old Evangelists?

*Shep.* Altho' he differs from them almost in every thing; and it should therefore seem, that his authorities ought to be very strong; yet he cites no records, relies on no authorities but his own; and only assures us, that Christ did not, could not, speak and act, as the Evangelists take upon them to say he did.

*Temp.* This is ridiculous.

*Shep.* Consider, Sir, the Evangelists, who were men of no great genius, could not so well have known what they saw our Saviour do, or heard him say, as Mr. Chubb did, who, by the force of most astonishing talents, hath found out what Christ ought, or ought not, to have said and done. Hence it is, that he sets us right in our ideas of Christ's person, character, mission, and doctrine. How it should come to pass, that this sacred penman of the Gospel should speak to us, now he is dead, in the strain of a Deist, is not to be accounted for, but by one as eminent for conjectures as himself.

*Temp.* It is a most difficult matter for him, who peruses these writings, so full are they of opposite drifts, and gross contradictions, to find out what their author would be at, unless it was the glory of being an author, and the profits arising from the retail of his books, on which, and the contributions of his Disciples, he lived more comfortably, as the missionary of infidelity, than he could have done, as a tradesman, on the income of his two honestest callings. My inquiries have already given you so much trouble, that I am almost afraid to ask, whether you have yet seen the book lately prohibited in France, intitled, *Les Mœurs*. I must own I think it a very fine performance; but I know not how to form a clear idea, either of the design its Author had in writing it, or of the principles he would instil by it.

*Shep.* I am surpris'd you should find the least difficulty in that. Does he not, in his *preliminary discourse on virtue*, insist, that the law or religion of nature is innate, and, if attended to, sufficiently clear and cogent?

Does

Does he not in his introduction tell us, *The existence of a Deity is a truth so clear in itself, that a train of argumentations serve only to obscure it; and that the human mind hath as general, and as regular, an idea of the infinite perfections of God, as it hath of his being?* Does he not also maintain, that the natural law hath been rendered obscure or doubtful only by the passions of men, and the superstitious innovations, introduced from time to time, in all countries?

*Temp.* If I remember right, he does.

*Shep.* Nay, he goes farther; for he says, notwithstanding the prevalence of our passions and innovations, all men have right ideas of duty and morality. In order to degrade our Saviour and his Apostles from the office of instructing us, he would have us look on ourselves, as sufficiently enlightened by nature, and consequently in no need of religious or moral teachers. After this (who would expect it?) he entertains us with very particular lectures concerning the nature of religion, devotion, and virtue, as if we were wholly ignorant of them all. Do we know our duty to God, ourselves, and mankind, already? Why then does he inform us of these things? Is he so *self sufficient* as to think nobody ought to preach to us, but himself? If the law of nature is obscured or frustrated only by passion and superstition, all he had to do, was to point his wit against those obstructors of truth and goodness. As soon as they are dispersed, the light of nature will shine clearly from within, and render impertinent his, and all other treatises, about *Manners*. This inconsistency and presumption would be the more excusable, were not his moral lectures interspersed here and there with sentiments exceedingly loose, and repugnant to the strictness he every-where pretends to, and with such characters and descriptions, as tend but the more strongly to soften, to corrupt, and pollute the heart, for their being painted with the utmost delicacy, and enlivened with the finest strokes of imagination. He dedicates his book to a married Lady in a kind of *Platonic Billet-doux*; and in the work itself expatiates on his passion for her in such terms, as cannot but disquiet the mind of her husband, if he knows his wife by the name  
of

of *Menoqui*. This effect it can hardly fail of, notwithstanding the protestations, with which the Author, in that passage, flourishes on his virtue; and the rather, because in many others he takes particular delight in dwelling on that intercourse of the sexes, which would be highly criminal, if not authorized by marriage.

*Temp.* As for marriage, in our sense of the word, he does not approve of it; but would have a man and woman live together, without any vow or ceremony, if they love each other, and part when they cease to do so.

*Shep.* The more need hath *Menoqui*'s husband to keep both the Author and his book, as far from the goddess as he can; for, allowing that we may judge of the former by the latter, no man is qualified to put her virtue to a severer trial, if his person does not carry in it an antidote sufficient to prevent in her the possibility of a weakness towards him. Never did Libertinism appear with an aspect so engaging, with a mien so charming, or in a dress so genteel, as this writer hath given it. His words are steeped in honey; his periods polished off with the greatest exactness; his sentiments covered with the most delicate gilding; his reflections, descriptions, characters, seasoned up with wit and elegance, to the most exalted palate; above all, his principles are so sweet and soothing, that they enter into a sensual heart, like an enchantment, and, rising from thence thro' the imagination, seize the judgment, and captivate the will. He seldom reasons; but his assertions pass on the reader, like those of a beautiful woman on the beholder, for convincing arguments.

*Temp.* The virtue of *Menoqui* can't be more endangered by the Author, than the principles of other young people by his bewitching book. What a beautiful allegory is that, in which he represents the law of nature as engraved on an island of marble in the heart! The water, he tells us, which surrounds this island, is sometimes so raised by tides and tempests, as to cover the inscription, and prevent its being legible, but never so as to wash it away.

*Shep.* The similitude is indeed very fine, but more consonant to the Author's hypothesis, than to fact and nature.



nature. The mind of man comes into being without any characters or inscriptions engraved on it. It is a field covered with a rich soil; but hath not in itself the root or seed of a single plant. In this condition it lies for some time, till *Discipline* or *Correction* breaks it up, and mellows it, and till *Education* sows it with seeds of various kinds; from whence immediately springs a crop of plants, some nutritious and wholesome, some useless or baneful. Reason, the lord of the soil, soon after enters, and is employed in rooting out the one, and watering the other; while, in spite of all he can do, a number of beasts, more or less disposed to fear and obey him, entering by another passage, devour the produce, for the most part the better produce of the field. A few of them indeed submit to his yoke, and are employed in drawing water, or in cultivating anew such parts of the ground, as he hath lately cleared from the weeds and brambles.

*Temp.* **T**HE smaller Libertine writers, such as Coward, Apgill, a few Pamphleteers, and those who, in handling other subjects, give religion a blow as they pass, are not worth notice. They are fallen into disuse among the Deistical party itself; and are generally of too low a character, both in point of sense and entertainment, to merit an animadversion (*a*).

(*a*) In this class is to be ranked a bulky pamphlet, published since this Dialogue was wrote, and intitled, *Heaven open to all men*; in which the stupidity and profaneness of the Author are so equally eminent, that one knows not from which of the two to draw its character. It is mentioned here only to confirm what hath been frequently insisted on in these Dialogues, that, of all writings, none are so eagerly caught at in a dissolute age and country, as those which promise the indulgence of God and happiness to profligates. Nothing can so strongly exemplify that observation, as the great demand for this despicable performance, the artifice of which is so gross, that it may be seen thro' by a child, the matter so wicked, the manner so clumsy, as not to be relished, but by such as have a taste for garbage. Yet all the refinement of the *Characteristics*, and all the wit of the *Independent Whig*, could not give them so quick a passage into the world, as its bare title has procured for the senseless pamphlet mentioned.

Shep.

Shep. **Y**OU have already seen, Sir, with how much art each Deistical writer labours to insinuate his principles, and beat out of his reader's mind the principles of Christianity. If you will believe them, they are under a necessity of using stratagem and cunning for these purposes, to prevent the prosecutions to which an opener conduct might expose them in this age of bigotry. A suit at law, or a fine, is too severe a martyrdom for any one to run the hazard of, who sets forth, that all men have already sufficient means of knowing what he proposes to teach them : but if their instructions be of no use to the world, every man being able to teach himself, why do they publish, every day, whole volumes of those instructions ? Is it only to gratify their vanity, they become authors ? If it be, why do they not choose to write Novels and Plays, which might entertain the very same class of small readers, whose tastes are as tallies to such writers, and acquire them a more solid reputation, than performances that tell us, almost in every page, they themselves are needless ? As authors of this stamp write from the heart, rather than the head, there is no propensity, in that magazine of Libertinism, that may not be voided to great advantage in a Play, or a Novel. On the other hand, if they esteem their own writings as highly useful to mankind, why do men, so full of benevolence, and love to the species, so transported with the beauty of virtue, particularly of sincerity, suffer the trifling terror of a fine to lay an imbargo on the important truths they have discovered, and force them to have recourse to a base dissimulation, which miserably maims and distorts those truths in the very birth ? Dark dealings, and pitiful arts, fit only for the basest of men to practise, are, surely, very unbecoming ingredients in the conduct of an Hero, whose soul is wholly divested, to use the expression of Lord Shaftesbury, of *self-passions*, warmed with *natural and social affections*, and sublimed by perfect raptures of *benevolence*. But what are the dreadful severities, that force these writers to lye, in so infamous a manner, for the truth ? I can hardly think the tyranny of a jury capable of frightening these souls of the first magnitude;  
for

for not one in ten of them hath been ever prosecuted at law for his book; and such as were, made twice as much by the retail of their counterband wares, as they lost by the prosecution. It is not, therefore, in reality, the dread of prosecution, to which the dissimulation of Libertine writers is owing, but to a consciousness that their principles would appear shocking, did they expose them to view without disguise. There is no one thing contributes so much to a right examination of principles, as a due attention to the tendency of those principles; because the best arguments, either for or against their truth, are drawn from a clear foresight of their effects. All this advantage is lost to him, on whom any opinion is imposed, under the mask of another, or a contrary opinion: for as he does not yet think it different, in itself, from that which was formerly in possession of his assent, so he looks on its tendency as the same; neither does he perceive, that his opinion is materially changed, till the axioms, on which it is founded, are riveted in his mind: so that, when the change begins to be perceived, he is pleased with it, and to such a degree blinded by prepossession, as either not to see, or to be delighted with, its tendency. It is thus that Christians art taught infidelity by writers, and upon maxims, that seem, at first, to be purely Christian.

*Temp.* You hit exactly the artifice practised on me, to wean my raw and unsuspicious mind from Christianity: and, I must say, it had been infinitely a more gentleman-like injury to have picked my pocket, than my mind. The pilferer of principles is the worst sort of thief; for he not only filches the most valuable of all our possessions, the very seeds of religion and virtue, but, what is still a greater injury, leaves, in the place of them, his own notions, the seeds of infidelity and wickedness. He comes in the night, when we are asleep; and, having stripped the house of all that is useful or ornamental, he sets it on fire over our heads, and then escapes unseen under the additional coverture of the smoke.

*Shep.* The scandalous artifice of sowing infidelity in the garb of Christians, is however, but one out of a thousand, practised by the same disingenuous set of men,

and for the same detestable purpose. Matters, wholly foreign to the controversy about Christianity, are lugged into it by these pretended enemies to prejudice, in order to blind and byass the minds of silly people, and to make up for the want of solid arguments arising from the nature of the dispute itself. Christianity must be an imposture, because bad men are thrust by worse into the Ministry; altho', at the same time, the labours and virtues of a good Clergyman are not allowed to reflect the least honour on the religion he preaches, nor at all to vouch for its truth and usefulness; neither are the horrible vices of our Libertine preachers ascribed, in the least, to their principles, notwithstanding the manifest tendency of those principles to vice, and the open panegyrics published by some among them, directly recommending vice itself. The maintenance of the Clergy, which, in nine parishes out of ten throughout *England* and *Wales*, is rather a proper support for a mechanic, than for a man of education, is turned into a popular argument against Christianity. The Clergy are said to preach religion, not in regard to its truth, or the good of mankind, but for their own interest; while no one sees that those who press this argument as an objection to our religion, must, if religion is laid aside, take the maintenance of the Clergy to themselves. It is pure selfishness in us, to retain our pittance; yet those who would take it from us, are not so much as suspected of any view to their own interest in propagating infidelity, which cannot generally take place, without giving to infidels all that magnified wealth, enjoyed, at present, by the Clergy. Jokes and sneers are also called in to support a bad cause, and to render light and ridiculous the ideas of religion, which otherwise, and in themselves, are solemn and awful. For this purpose, the honourable writer, whom we have had occasion to mention so often, hath given us a long and elaborate treatise on Buffoonry, and the use of it thus applied. It was not enough for him, like a mere theorist, to delineate and recommend this new controversial engine; he hath descended from the state and dignity of a *Lord*, and played it off himself with all the skill and address that could be expected from both a professor and



a practitioner. And is Christianity an imposture, because its grave and solemn ideas may be assembled in the brain of a Libertine buffoon with such low and ridiculous notions as are apt to shoot up in a mind of that turn? The gravest subjects are the most liable to ridicule, nothing being more easy, and practicable by the greatest blockhead, than to tack together an absurd and solemn idea, in which consists the essence of burlesque. The oddity and boldness of a profane jest gives it the advantage of surprize, by which the laugh is obtained before it is at all considered, whether there is any sense at the bottom of it, or not; and if it is tinctured, although never so slightly, with real humour, it passes, with the senseless, for an unanswerable argument against religion. It was thus that *Aristophanes* attempted, in his *Comedy of the clouds*, to baffle the philosophy of *Socrates*, which he knew he could not refute. Altho' this weapon is used by Libertines with no small degree of haughtiness and cruelty, against their adversaries; yet they have the assurance to claim the benefit, and exercise the force, of another, not in the least consistent with it. Of all the Christian graces, charity is set forth to us as the chief; and, no doubt, comprehends in it a tenderness for such as differ from us in opinion or principle. As *Libertinism* is yet only in its growth, it stands in need of toleration and indulgence to mature it; and therefore they who labour to push it forward in the world, do all they can to shelter it under the wing of Christian charity, that, while it lies there protected, it may have an opportunity to stab Christianity itself to the heart. With this view, our Libertines, of all degrees and distinctions, call aloud on Christians for charity, which, among themselves, and the polite world, they dignify with the more fashionable names of *benevolence*, and *social affection*. This amiable virtue they rightly represent as the patroness of free inquiry and truth, to distinguish it from zeal, the mother, if you will believe them, of ignorance, superstition, and persecution.

*Temp.* I know not whether they are more beholden to any other art, than this, for the prodigious progress they have made: it serves them for a surtout to all the rest:  
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and altho' it is pleaded for, chiefly, as an introduction to truth; yet it is made a covering for such dissingenuity as was never before employed in her service.

*Shep.* Nor, indeed, ever can be: but if charity and zeal are so diametrically opposed to each other, that the first cannot be a virtue, unless the last is a vice, how can charity serve the cause of truth, if it is carried so far, as to divest us of all zeal and attachment to truth? Or is zeal to be extinguished in the breasts of Christians only, while they yet look on their principles as great and necessary truths, and while the opposers of those principles are allowed to be as warm as all their passions can make them, in their attacks on Christianity? If I, as a Christian, cannot help taking these men to be enemies to my religion, am I not, in that case, bound to detect their artifices, to give warning of the poison they would infuse, and to oppose them, to the uttermost of my power? Charity itself ought to inspire me with zeal in such a service; for how, otherwise, can I pretend to say I love God, if I desert what I take to be his religion? Or man, if I suffer him to be corrupted, when I have it in my power to prevent it? Surely I have, at least, as good a right openly to oppose that which I believe to be a dangerous error, as any man can have covertly to defend or insinuate it. It is certain, charity is not confined to its proper office, nor applied to its own genuine purpose, when it renders us cool and indifferent to the truth and purity of religion, or teaches us to think it a matter of no consequence, what we ourselves, or others, whom it is our duty to instruct, shall adopt for religion. If we are to compare extremes, I know not any excess of zeal more prejudicial to mankind, than this stupid atheistical indifference.

*Temp.* But is not zeal, when once it gets footing in the mind, extremely apt to degenerate into a fierce and persecuting spirit?

*Shep.* Just as apt as any other species of warmth is to run out into extremes; but as soon as it discovers this tendency, charity is to soften, and knowledge to set bounds to it: for one may love God and religion, without hating those who shew the same love another way, or

even those who do neither. Nay, the love of God is the best preparative to the love of man, who, howsoever unamiable he may chance to be in himself, is, notwithstanding, the work of God, and our fellow-creature. I never thought it matter of wonder, that our Libertines should put on so great a shew of temper, benevolence, and indulgence for the principles of others; having observed their own opinions to hang so loose about them. The zeal they are actuated by, is not exerted so much to enliven their own principles, as it is to deaden the principles of such as still adhere to revelation, and to make them ashamed of their attachment to it. For this latter purpose, they have employed so much common-place and ridicule, and their younger brethren in the Church have so effectually assisted them herein, that the spirit of Christianity is become, by their means, a thing perfectly ungenteel, and not to be tolerated above the vulgar. It is a flame that rises towards heaven, indeed; but cools and contracts, the higher it goes among men, till it ends in smoke at the upper end of life. Among the foreign aids of Libertinism, we may justly reckon the bulk of such quotations as the Deistical Authors borrow from the writings of Divines, whose ill-judged defences of religion, founded, not on the spirit and genius of religion itself, but on occasional systems of their own, are by no means to be charged to its account. If the Libertine would overturn Christianity, let him refute the Bible itself, which is by no means answerable for the refinements of *Cumberland, Tillotson, Scot, Clarke, &c.* These were among the foremost of mankind in understanding; yet still they were but men; and as such (I speak it with all imaginable deference) were weak enough to run up their apologetical systems to extremes; drawing all their forces to oppose the assault made on one side of the garison, while they were inattentive to the sap on the other: for, as we have already observed, religion hath been attacked, on all sides, with arts and arguments, not more opposite to Christianity, than inconsistent with one another. Our Libertines propose to themselves a very cunning end, by affecting obscurity in their writings. If the Divines had not answered them, they must have kept the field, and  
made

made a triumph; yet they could not be answered, without detecting their principles: so that their adversaries became their commentators, and explained those principles to the world, which their Authors had wrapped up in doubtful and ambiguous expressions, and which, had it not been for the necessity of exposing their pernicious nature, it would have been wisdom to have left involved in a darkness, that became them much better than light. There are poisons too volatile to be safely thrown into the streets, or trod upon. Among all the arts used by Libertines, there is not one of so much service to them, as the promise of unbounded liberty, which comes foremost in their endeavours to make profelytes. Vanity is impatient of that authority, *Self-sufficiency* of that instruction, and vice of that restraint, which religion brings along with it. To these, a licence to think and act at large, is proposed, while reason is amused with specious arguments, the tendency of which is too sweet to an haughty or a sensual mind, to be resisted. Nay, this licentiousness is recommended to those who have still some tincture of religion, under the name of Christian liberty; for in such men Christianity may be best undermined by the Gospel, and revelation refuted by Scripture.

*Temp.* The teachers of Libertinism act, in this, like those besiegers who will not capitulate with the Governor, but in the hearing of the townsmen, to whom they make their proposals as agreeable as they can, in hopes, by that stratagem, to excite a sedition, that may end in a surrender. Pursuant to this artifice, they generally make their attacks upon the young and giddy, whose passions are strong, whose conceit is high, and whose reason is not yet arrived at maturity.

*Shep.* Hence it comes, that, when Libertinism gets footing in a seminary of learning, it fails not to make a prodigious progress, and to produce a shoal of pert pedantic disputants, who know human nature perfectly well, before they have had any intercourse with mankind; who can decide all the controversies about religion, without having learned a tittle of them; whose understandings, in short, altho' as yet in the cradle of knowledge, have all on a sudden discovered, what all the sages



of former times were strangers to, that every individual man, who preached up religion to the world, was a knave; and every mortal, who believed in it, was a fool. This discovery, however, only serves for shew; but they have made another, of singular use, namely, that whatsoever their own hearts dictate, in respect to a bottle, a mistress, or any thing else, they have an unquestionable right to execute. All that a whimsical or artful head could invent, all that a dissolute heart could suggest, hath been played off against Christianity in these latter times; no stratagem hath been left untried; no artifice that could impose on the silly, no bait that could catch the men of pleasure, no indulgence that could tempt the licentious, no scoffs nor calumnies that could expose the defenders of religion, no charm that could stupefy the thoughtful, and no sophistry that could bewilder the inquirer after truth, hath been neglected. As one of the grand advantages of Libertinism arises from novelty, so a world of industry hath been used, by its teachers, to preserve an appearance of it. A Libertine book, or system, hath no sooner been solidly refuted, or antiquated, than they have supplied its place with another, that served as well to feed the herd of *Epicurus* with filth of a new relish. One of these dies away, and becomes as stale as the Bible; but, before its gloss is quite worn off, another, more suitable to the times, is provided. They pass, like clouds, darkening this or that principle of Christianity, till they are puffed away by some new wind of doctrine. Shameful cause! that stands in so much need of craft to support it, and, not daring to shew its face, is forced not only to wear a mask, but to change it almost every day, lest it should be known for the same detestable fiend, already detected as the author of infinite mischief! To feed their disciples with a sufficient change of new varieties, they sometimes invent new religions, which serve almost as well to hurt the true one, as turning the coat of Deism. About twenty years ago, Mr. *Puppy*, who is a most sufficient gentleman, and an Atheist, was greatly admired, at least by himself, for a new kind of pick-tooth of his own invention, which he wittily called his chaplain, because it took his meat from between his teeth:

teeth: this extraordinary success having discovered to him the force of his own genius, he afterwards invented a new religion, which had somewhat in it extremely parallel to his pick-tooth; for it was wholly calculated to remove the remaining scruples of such as have not yet arrived at perfect Atheism. This he preached up with a bottle in his hand, and got six disciples. *Puppy's* turn of mind, in this invention, is so common, that it enters into all the books wrote on religious subjects, which the authors, not knowing how otherwise to render curious, fashionable, and vendible, stuff with new-invented anodynes, that never fail to be swallowed with a most ridiculous greediness. Such, Sir, are the teachers of Libertinism, and such their arts, by which, as if truth and falsehood, good and evil, had changed their cloaths, the dispute about religion is turned into a mere masquerade of opinions.

*Temp.* **I**T was not, indeed, by such teachers, nor after such a manner, that Christianity was introduced into the world. To a sensible and ingenuous mind the different methods of recommending and propagating the true religion on the one side, and of insinuating infidelity on the other, are alone sufficient to determine its choice in favour of the former.

*Shep.* Nothing can be more true, as will appear upon a short comparison. The unaffected simplicity and purity of the Gospel stile, the calmness and force with which the most sublime and surprising precepts, the most important and alarming events, the strongest reasonings, and the most beautiful allusions, are delivered in the writings of the New Testament, shew plainly, that it was dictated by him who can thunder thro' a serene sky, and not by man, who, as the excellent Mr. *West* observes, could not, on subjects so apt to engage the heart, and fire the imagination, have abstained, if left to himself, from ecstasies and transports, nor from the highest decorations a rhetorical or poetical invention could have suggested. God manifested in the flesh, laid in a manger, educated by illiterate parents, and yet uttering such things as never man spoke; instructing men in more than human wisdom,

and to more than human goodness; revealing the most stupendous mysteries; commanding the winds and storms; conquering diseases, death, devils; yet submitting to all sorts of indignities with patience; doing good, and receiving evil, without the usual discomposure of an injured person in the one, or the least air of a benefactor in the other; spit upon, buffeted, ridiculed, with the silence and resignation of a lamb; sweating blood, agonizing in perfect health, replying to bitter taunts with tender and compassionate prayers, and at last, altho' King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, dying the death of a slave! What mere human historian could preserve a temper in writing of such things? And yet they are delivered without the least transport or embellishment; as if he who wrote them had been used to see or do the like: and indeed he was; for it was God. With what raptures would a judicious critic be transported, should he see, in an Heathen poet, such strokes of the calm and concise sublime, as these! *He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm: I will, be thou healed; and he became whole: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do: Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength, and his voice as the sound of many waters.*

What is the silent sublime of *Ajax* and *Dido*, if compared to that of our blessed Saviour, when, on the crowing of the cock, he turned, and looked at *Peter*? So much for the stile of the Gospel. As for the behaviour of those who preached it, nothing could discover an equal degree of truth and dignity. It was, like their stile, great in the midst of simplicity, majestic in the midst of modesty and submission. The light that shone both from their words and actions, was as the sun in his strength, illustrious, uniform, and reviving. On the other hand, the Apostles of Libertinism are full of noise and spatter; and their stile pompous on groveling subjects, and low on the sublime; ridiculous on serious, disingenuous on religious, and obscure on familiar topics, with a world of conceit and affectation. As to their conduct in propagating infidelity, it is made up of lyes, chicane, and hypocrisy, employed in tutoring their readers to dishonesty, lewdness,

ness, and pollutions more than brutal, in the midst of shameless professions of sincerity and piety. Their performances play, at first, like a lambent flame, about the heart, which they soon kindle into a vulcano, wherein every combustible passion is set on fire, and every virtue consumed. Christianity, Sir, owes its propagation to miracles; infidelity, to a love of vice: Christianity was preached to the world in simplicity; infidelity, in false eloquence and buffoonry: Christianity was vouched for by the martyrdom of its preachers; infidelity, by the gross chicane and dissimulation of its authors: Christianity came from God, who sent it into the world thro' the very best of men; infidelity came from the devil, who propagates it among unhappy mortals, predisposed to wickedness, by instruments exactly resembling himself.

*Temp.* Were there not men who are already fools by mere defect of understanding, and want to be villains on principle, the teachers of Libertinism could never make a single disciple: no kind of Author can insult his readers so grossly, as he who treats them like fools and block-heads. All cunning writers do this; but, having, for the most part, silly people to deal with, there is no offence taken: and others, who have more sense, shut their eyes, and swallow, because the potion is luscious. Had they not a most vehement thirst for it, the shocking conduct of those who administer it could not fail to prove it poison: for what else can come from such infamous dissemblers? The very men who, in their writings, affect such an air of piety, fill their conversation with blasphemy: they talk sometimes in an high strain about virtue, yet stick at no kind nor degree of wickedness, no enormity. In order to qualify for a place under the crown, they will receive the Sacrament between two horrible debauches, in which more sorts of crimes than one are committed; altho', by conforming to that holy ordinance, they declare, as strongly as actions can do, that they worship Christ as their God and Saviour, whom, all the world knows, they believe to have been a mere impostor. This, however, gives no disgust nor alarm to their disciples, who, of all men, are the most stupidly,



and the most slavishly blinded, by an high opinion of their leaders. People of little understanding are extremely apt to hold, in a strange degree of admiration, the capacities and persons of men, who are much above them in knowledge; and this, as I have found by myself, is the source of infinite mischief. I knew the writers, on both sides of the controversy about Christianity, were greatly superior to me in understanding; and as I had, therefore, no rule to measure altitudes, in my opinion, so much transcending my own, I imagined the Libertine Apostles overtopped the Christian, for no other reason, perhaps, but because their stile is more pompous, their matter more uncommon and surprising, and because they always assert with confidence, and censure with contempt. Like precipices, that shew all their elevation at once, they seemed more lofty than they really were; while the Christian writers, either rising more gradually, or being set at a greater distance, lost, in my estimation, one half of their height. I was guided by *Gibson* and *Conybeare* to the top of a mountain, without perceiving myself considerably raised above the plain; *Shaftesbury* and *Tindal* transported me suddenly, and, as it were, by magic art, to the brow of a precipice, which, altho' not higher than an ordinary hill, turned my head, and made it giddy. The conceit of younger Libertines is, I assure you, far from preventing in them a most slavish admiration of those who lead the way to infidelity; nor can all their airy notions of thinking freely, and for themselves, arm them against swallowing by the lump, with a most implicit resignation, such doctrines of their Libertine teachers, as ten thousand miracles could not reconcile them to, did those doctrines make a part of revelation.

*Shep.* **T**HERE are few men, who have leisure, inclination, and capacity, to make a competent search into the abstruse controversies about the nature of man, upon which others, equally difficult, about morality and religion, have been founded. In these no safe determination can be expected, without such intense thinking, and such a stock of learning, as fall to the lot of only one among a thousand: yet the rest, who have

have narrow talents, and little knowlege, must have their opinions about these matters, and must set up for as high assurance in those opinions, as the few, to whom nature and education have been kinder.

*Temp.* If it requires so great a degree of capacity and learning, to determine the controversy about Christianity among the *Literati*, either that controversy may be decided by something else than reason and study, or the ignorant part of mankind cannot be Christians on a rational footing: from whence it will follow, that it must be every whit as hard to reason one's self into Christianity, as out of it.

*Shep.* This, indeed, would follow, if there were no other way of satisfying our reason about the merits of this dispute, but by a learned disquisition. This is not really the case; for there is a short method, by which the illiterate may be safely determined whether the Christian religion ought to be adhered to, or not; and a longer for the learned. As to the first, the ignorant can easily proceed thus with himself: "Can I be happy in myself, or do my duty to the community, without living an innocent and virtuous life? Will my natural ignorance and corruption suffer me to lead such a life, without the instructions and sanctions of revealed religion? Of all the religions in the world, that pretend to come from God, is there any, that so fully comes up to all my wants, that carries with it such an appearance of truth and power, as the Christian?" In contrast to this, there is another short method, used by a mind disposed to Libertinism: "Why were appetites given me, if I am not to indulge them? Since neither the Christian, nor any other religion established in the world, will grant me a licence to indulge those appetites at my own discretion, have I not a right to reject all those religions, and make it my only religion to live according to my nature?" As to those who will pursue the longer method of inquiry about religion thro' the wide ocean of learning and controversy, they ought first to consider whether they are provided with a rudder, sails, and ballast, for such a voyage. Although a strong natural judgment is, in the first place, absolutely neces-

fary to such an inquiry; yet, without abundance of learning, it will be of no use. He who knows little, let his talents be what they will, hath neither sufficient materials to work on, nor sufficient instruments to work with; and must therefore employ those he hath to ends and purposes quite foreign to their natural aptitudes and powers. Like a tradesman, who hath but two or three tools, and therefore must saw with an hatchet, and bore with a chissel; the illiterate or half-learned controvertist is forced with a little modern philosophy, and a scanty stock of reading, scarcely extending farther than his mother-tongue can carry him, to beat his way through controversies impossible to be learnedly settled without a great skill in *Latin, Greek, Hebrew,* and antiquities. If he is a *Buckinger*, mere necessity may turn his stumps into a sort of hands, with which he may perform feats to be wondered at, not because they exceed the performances of other men, but because they are done under so great disadvantages. Notwithstanding this, it is a point much laboured at by our present Libertines, of all degrees, to decry learning, study, and antiquity; and to recommend nature as the best instructor and guide. This they do, because learning and antiquity are against their principles; and nature, by which they mean human nature, in its present degenerate condition, favours those principles, as much as they again patronize their vicious pleasures. Nature in man, as well as other animals, if destitute of culture, quickly grows wild and savage. If we are to make no advantage of history or antiquity, why do *Perault*, and *Sir Thomas Pope Blount*, call the present times the antient? It is true, the world, like a man, may grow wiser, as it grows older; but surely, this it cannot do by decrying, and laying aside, the knowlege of antiquity, on which, alone, all new improvements must be built. This witty reflection, therefore, made use of by the writers mentioned, to vilify antient learning, contradicts and subverts itself; for, in respect to knowlege, a man can be called old, in the latter part of his life, only from the memory he retains of his past experiences and acquisitions. When the man of seventy hath lost his memory, he is again a child; and the world, in like

like manner, must return to ignorance and barbarism, if it neglects to enrich itself with the treasures of antiquity. Such, however, is the humour of the present times, that they will pretend to philosophy, and even learning, who never read above ten years backward, and who prefer the last Novel or News-paper to *Herodotus* and *Livy*. All this is done in order to strike at the Bible, from whence we draw, and by which we prove, our religion: for the same reason, the writings of the Fathers, those outworks to the Sacred Volumes, are cried down, and laid aside, and their excellent Authors ridiculed, by the name of Grey-beards, and Old women. Behold the judgment of God on such a conduct! These despisers of antiquity are carrying the present age with them headlong into ignorance and barbarism, insomuch that even infidelity will, in a little time, have nothing else to found itself on but the former, nor to defend itself with, but the latter. Our country, so famous, in the last century, for its *Boyles*, *Newtons*, *Addisons*, &c. hath, at present, few rising geniuses to boast of in any of the arts and sciences. Who is there to follow *Carve*, *Sanderfon*, *Bull*, *Barrow*, *Tillotson*, and the few eminent Divines, still living, whom we borrow from the last century? Who, to take the place of *Newton* and *Halley* in mathematics and natural philosophy? Who, to succeed *Dryden*, *Congreve*, *Pope*, or *Swift*, in wit and poetry?

*Temp.* I take your observation, which is but too just, to be an omen of approaching barbarism. What can men expect, in any species of production, from nature unimproved, or reason uninstructed? The same thing happens in all human performances, for instance, in dramatic poetry, as well as Theology: if a man follows, in either, the dictates of his own fancy, without rules or culture, he must fail of truth in the one, and of excellence in the other. It is true, he that thinks or writes in this manner, conforms to his own particular nature, or perhaps the passions and taste of men less refined than himself: but he follows not true or general nature, no more than he does right reason. For this I may appeal, in respect to dramatic poetry, to *Aristotle*, *Horace*, *Cervantes*, *Dacier*, and the Duke of *Buckingham*, in *Gildon's*  
*Essay*



*Essay on the art and rise of the stage*; nay, and to Lord *Shaftesbury* himself. Now it is, I think, not a little strange, that even deistical critics, such as Lord *Shaftesbury* and *Gildon*, who own that the greatest geniuses can do almost nothing, without learning and culture, as to other kinds of production, wherein fancy predominates, and reason acts only a secondary part, should, in respect to the production of religious knowlege, insist, that a man of the meanest capacity, altho' utterly uninstructed, may easily strike out a perfect system, and, when he hath done, defend it with sufficient reasons. There are some, who, presuming on the truth of this extraordinary opinion, boldly enter the lists of religious controversy, without any fund of reading or knowlege. Others, however, whom I could name, do read; but it is in a way the most whimsical you can imagine: they run over a book with all imaginable haste and impatience, tipping the *Italics* as they go along, to pick out a general notion of the author's subject and matter, in order to flourish with it in conversation among beaux and ladies: this they call *Skimming*. If a solid and learned performance were milk, they might, by this method, get the cream; but, such performances being strong liquors, fermented in the head of a great genius, the *skimmer* gets nothing but the scum and froth. But he seldom deals in any thing else than modern trifles, penned by authors who are as great *Skimmers* in writing, as he is in reading: so that he rarely gets any thing more, than that lighter kind of froth which rides on the very surface. There are, however, different degrees of *Skimmers*: first, he who goes no farther than the Title-page, as *Librarius*, famous for his collection of gilded books; secondly, he who proceeds to the contents and index, as *Micarius*, the common-place declaimer; and, lastly, he who runs over the better part of a book, dipping here and there into the two or three first lines of a paragraph, and, like the *king's fisher*, now-and-then picking out a small morsel for retail.

*Shep.* Your account of the *Skimmers*, who are a species of readers I never heard of before, is very entertaining.

**I**F I remember rightly, I think you said in speaking of yourself, when a Deist, that your Libertine principles had a bad effect on your morals.

*Temp.* The beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice, were then all the moral principles I had: others may speak for themselves; but, for my own part, I confess, the beauty even of a bad woman generally made a greater impression on me, than the beauty of virtue; and, as to the deformity of vice, I can only say, that I had by no means so great a distaste to drunkenness, as to temperance. This, perhaps, was owing to my not abstracting and subliming my principles as high as Lord Shaftesbury did; but this I must say, that not a soul of my deistical acquaintances was a whit more refined in his morals than myself; nay, most of them were so grossly wicked, that their vices could not be even reprov'd, without indecency.

*Shep.* If a real Christian can be an ill liver, his religion, I am sure, is not to be blamed for it; and if a Deist should lead a better life than a Christian, trace the wonder to what cause you will, most certainly his principles are not to be thanked for it; these principles laying him under no ties, which every Christian is not subject to, and taking off others of the greatest strength. Virtue is a thing of such importance, that it cannot be founded on too firm a basis. In the Christian religion it is built on the love of ourselves, which, say what we will, is the strongest of all our natural propensities and instincts; whereas, in Deism, it rests on the internal sense of moral beauty and deformity alone, which, as Christians are men, must be found in them, as well as in Deists. Besides, the *self-sufficient* Deist is his own judge, and may be as indulgent to himself as he pleases: for, in case of guilt, he hath a thousand amusements to blunt the feeble stings of the moral sense, and can reward his well-doing with unlimited applauses: but the Christian hath God for his judge, and conscience for his witness; whose admonitions, altho' never so severe, he is not at liberty to stifle, but, on the contrary, is obliged to enliven them with the most intense and continual reflections, and to attend

attend to them with all possible patience and submission. This comparison gives us Christians no small cause to be uneasy at living among men, whose hands are at liberty for the perpetration of any villainy, while ours are tied up by our religion, from even a defensive resentment. I know most men recommend restraints to others, but keep themselves as free as they can. If, however, we all have reason to fear one another in some degree, which experience tells me is the case; it is necessary we should all, in proportion, be bound over to our good behaviour by better security than merely that of the moral sense. An intellectual *Narcissus*, like Lord *Shaftesbury*, may be deeply smitten with the beauties of his own mind, reflected from the mirror of his own conceit; but, notwithstanding this, the rest of mankind may have so much reason to think otherwise of him, as to let him live and die without any other admirers than those, whose whimsical understandings are disposed to dwindle into the mere *echoes* of his opinions. The present times are, no doubt on't, very happy under the influence of the new principles, which have planted so much *benevolence, and love of the species*, among us, that a woman cannot refuse to propagate it with other men, as well as her husband. *Friendship*, too, runs so high upon the new *benevolent system*, that a man will hardly hesitate to lye, perjure, or murder, for his friend. Every man begins to know the right use, and true value, of laws and society; and sells them accordingly. Loose principles are retained only as panders to loose desires, and serve as well as confessors, who turn pimps to those that maintain them.

THEY who have any real regard for the political welfare of their country, be they never so indifferent about religion, should consider a little to what a catastrophe the reigning principles of the times are guiding this unhappy nation: so much of our Libertine notions as is old, hath been already suspected by Philosophers; distrusted, as insufficient, or pernicious, to the ends of society, by Legislators; and condemned, as chimerical, by the experience of all ages and nations. So much

much of it as is new, is either untried, or found, on trial, to be destructive; and therefore is not to be trusted. The *French* Libertines, generally speaking, don't wish for the abolition even of Popery; because, being very national, they don't wish for the ruin of their country, having no other social basis to lay but religion, nor influence to introduce any other religion, than the one established. Directly opposite to theirs is our conduct, as well of those who retain a faint sense of religion, as of those who have none. We are untying, or rather cutting asunder, the great band of society, and setting the constitution adrift: we are throwing down conscience, the only basis of patriotism and public spirit, and thereby making way for factions, for unfaithful services, and thro' them, at length, for slavery to foreign powers, as well political as ecclesiastical. Who is he that is blind enough not to see the effect? And who so disingenuous, as not to confess the cause? Every one cries out for liberty; yet every one is doing his utmost to make himself, or his son, a slave: for such is the nature of things, and such the irresistible course of Providence, that an infidel and dissolute people can never be free. Men who are religious and good, may be trusted, not only with freedom, but with such a degree of power, as they have sufficient capacities to employ; but, being once become irreligious and wicked, they immediately grow lawless, and utterly unfit to govern themselves or others. It is a flat political contradiction to itself, and to universal experience, to say, that freedom and infidelity can ever be found together in one and the same people: as soon as faith is banished from among men, they tend naturally and swiftly to a state of absolute slavery; for they are ever ready to sell and betray themselves, having no government of their appetites and pleasures, nor any interest, but the present, which they always endeavour to make the most of. Such men, being altogether unfit for freedom, which would but let them loose, like beasts of prey, upon one another, do, by an happy tendency of nature, or a just curse on infidelity, forge chains for themselves. As every disease in the natural body tends, of itself, to its own cure; a *plethora* thro' a *nausea* to emptiness,



emptiness, and a cold thro' a fever to health; in the political body likewise, God hath so constituted our nature, that, when men become wicked, they unavoidably lose the government of themselves, both individually and politically; generally giving up so much of their freedom, as they have already lost of their virtue, till they come to be governed, like beasts, by fear and compulsion only. He who cannot, in any measure, govern himself; as a madman, must be wholly restrained and confined. Nature never overleaps the bounds prescribed to it by religion, without falling immediately into that which it would avoid. The professed man of pleasure always leads the most unpleasant life. The Libertine is he, of all men, who is the greatest stranger to liberty. How oddly do men hasten to be slaves, thro' an unbounded latitude of principle, and a wild licentiousness of practice! The greatest evil attending this progress toward slavery is, that, in proportion as men become more dissolute, and less fit for power, or even freedom; so they become continually more enamoured of both. Hence it is that our Libertines, looking on the happy freedom of our constitution as nothing, shew, on all occasions, a rank tincture of republican principles: but as in religious, so in political matters, they discover an extreme and pitiable folly; for they speak in terms most extravagantly panegyric of the usurper *Cromwell*, toast his memory, and wish for such another. A greater instance of absurdity than this, cannot be conceived, if we only consider, that *Cromwell* turned the republic, already formed by his party, into an absolute tyranny, by means of his interest in the army: but if we look a little further, and consider our Libertines as men of profligate lives, and desperate fortunes; we shall discover a little more sense than we expected in their desiring another *Cromwell*, to lead them thro' innovation, oppression, and murder, to the pillage of three kingdoms; and to recal those infernal scenes of distraction and desolation, when subjects sat in judgment on their king, when ignorant enthusiasts and hypocrites stood in the pulpits, from whence they had driven a pious and learned Clergy; when, in a word, both the constitution and the Church were, like *St. Peter*, crucified with their

their heads downward. If a rampant spirit of infidelity had not burst the very bands of nature, and divested men of all concern for the fortunes and liberties of their own posterity, they could not be so blind to the approaching ruin of their country; which cannot be far distant, if an horrible corruption both of principles and manners, if an almost universal venality of every thing sacred and profane, or if the curse of an insulted God, are sufficient to effect it.

*Temp.* **I** Protest you frighten me. When I compare what you say, on this subject, with the prodigious growth of irreligion among the great ones; I cannot help trembling for the fate of *England*. What can the Deists have in view, by aiming at the very vitals of their country? I know, full well, they as little expect the rewards, as fear the punishments, of futurity: it cannot, therefore, be with an eye to such matters, that they labour in the cause of infidelity. But, supposing them never so well satisfied of the truth and usefulness of their principles, they could hope for no reward, after propagating them by arts fit only for the service of a master who delights in untruth and dissimulation. But sure I am, their zeal does not proceed from a warm attachment to their principles, any further than as they serve their own present purposes. They are all Sceptics, and lay, in reality, no sort of stress on those opinions they take so much pains to spread. If they kept their latitudinarian notions to themselves, and left others to the ties of religion, might they not draw great advantages from thence? This considered, their labouring to make proselytes is nothing else than a preposterous industry to multiply rivals for those profits and pleasures to which their principles open them a free passage. They do not thus invite others to share their mistresses with them.

*Shep.* You have touched a subject, Sir, that hath exercised my wonder, as well as yours, and seems to lie concealed in mysteries too abstruse for my penetration. The pride of leading the way in new opinions; the uneasiness arising from a want of numbers to countenance a set of notions,

notions, the truth of which their own Authors are by no means satisfied about; the œconomy of making their vicious principles cater for themselves by the money arising from the sale of their books; may, indeed, stir up men to dispute and harangue for Libertinism, and now-and-then prompt them with the substance of a Deistical book. But these motives are not sufficient to account for their uniting in Clubs; for their assigning to each member the subject his particular talent best qualifies him to handle; for their joining to grub up the materials that are to rig out the next performance; for their sending Missionaries, sometimes at a considerable expence, to distant places; or for their uniformly persevering, during more than a century, in a work that must seem so burdensome to men of ease and pleasure, so contrary to their consciences, if they have any, and so destructive to their country, if men so loose and disengaged can be said to have a country.

*Temp.* The whole affair is, indeed, very astonishing: they are men of too much sense and design, to toil, in this manner, for no purpose: and yet, as in the means we can discover nothing but art and cunning; so, in the end, we can perceive nothing but folly.

*Shep.* Folly, levity, novelty, might produce such an effect in one or two, and for a short time; but such causes are not apt to be so constant, uniform, and active, in their operations: neither are they able to scheme so deep, to choose out such artful instruments and means, to extend their views to such a distance; nor, thro' so long a tract of time, to pursue their designs with an address and steadiness, not always employed to promote the most interesting ends. For these reasons, and some others, I have been often tempted to believe, that Popery is either the natural parent, or, at least, the fosterer, of Libertinism.

*Temp.* Bless us! do you think the Papists, who rigidly adhere to their own principles, and so vehemently labour to suppress all freedom of thought, could either broach or propagate a set of notions so directly contrary to their own, and so licentious in themselves? I remember you sometimes insinuated this as your opinion, in the debates  
with

with Mr. *Dechainé*; but I imagined you only did it to shew him the inconsistency of his arguments with his own principles.

*Shep.* You mistook me a little: I really am not sure the Gentleman is no Papist. If the members of the *Romish* Church are true to their own tenets, they look upon us, as Protestants and Heretics, to be all damned already. They cannot, therefore, put us in a worse condition, nor set us in a greater opposition to themselves, than, in their opinion, the Reformation itself must do. When it serves their purposes, and they have it in their power to persecute us, they make no scruple of condemning our bodies to temporary, and our souls to eternal flames. Such men cannot be supposed to make a conscience of any thing they do to us, unless it is of this, that they may reproach themselves with a crime, if at any time they have neglected to confound our principles, or to take away our lives. With them it must be a thing rather meritorious, than criminal, to turn us all into Deists or Atheists.

*Temp.* But surely, if we were either, we should be still farther removed from a possibility of returning to Popery.

*Shep.* By no means. The extremes of Atheism and Superstition fly off from each other with such a repulsion, but in such a circle, as is very apt to bring them together again on the opposite side. He who hath no religion, is much more likely to become a convert to any particular religion, than he who is attached to an opposite one. The Papists know too well, that as soon as Libertinism shall have ruined these nations, it will be easy to reduce them to Popery by the assistance of Popish Princes, and of a Popish Pretender to the throne.

*Temp.* Could they hope, think you, that a Libertine nation would tamely submit to the yoke of superstition, and spiritual tyranny?

*Shep.* Consider, Sir, that such a people could neither stick together, nor stand by one another, against any incroachment: besides, as all they desire is, to render the men of figure and power indifferent to all religion, if they



they can once get this effected, they may reasonably hope to do what they please with the common people.

*Temp.* But our men of fortune, altho' you suppose them perfectly indifferent to religion, will not suffer Popery to take place, which can never happen without a vast defalcation of their wealth.

*Shep.* A few leading men, of no principles, may be well enough supposed to find their own private account in favouring such a design; which if they should, they will find means to bring in a majority of the rest. This happens experimentally in every corrupt country, where the wealth of the whole community is always in the disposal of a few.

*Temp.* What you say hath some colour of reason; but by what instruments could the Pope carry on such a design? His emissaries, the Jesuits, are foreigners; and either cannot speak our language, or do it with so distinguishable an accent, that, were they to preach Deism among us, their drift, in so doing, could not be concealed.

*Shep.* Have we not numbers of Papists here at home, whose children may be bred up in *France*, or even here, by the Jesuits that lurk among us, to a thorough system of pious frauds? One of these candidates for dissimulation may be easily taught to wear, with a natural grace, the mask of an Enthusiast, a Libertine, a Deist, an Atheist, or any thing else that may serve the turn. Some of our leading Deists, as *Tindal* and *Toland*, had an opportunity of passing thro' a course of education, like this. *Pilloniere*, who propagated Deism in this kingdom, was bred a Jesuit, and found admittance here on the strength of a pretended quarrel with the rest of his order. *Collins*, when he was in *France* and *Holland*, held a most intimate intercourse with the Jesuits, and, after he returned to *England*, a constant correspondence. Of this Gentleman I must observe to you, that he argues on all occasions with the air of a Jesuit, and, for the most part, deals in the sophistical reasonings of the Papists. In his grounds, &c. he attacks the Scriptures with hardly any thing else than popish weapons. In the 19th number of the *Independent Whig* he proposes a string of queries concerning  
authority

authority in matters of faith, by which he labours to prove, that either there can be no such authority, or, if there is, it must be infallible, and reside in the Pope. The noble adversary of Christianity resided long enough in Popish countries, particularly in the kingdom of *Naples*, to find out, that Christianity had better be either intirely laid aside, or carried up as high as Popery, which he sometimes does not scruple to intimate, altho' obscurely, according to his custom.

*Temp.* As to *Tindal*, he is said to have made the exit of an Atheist; whereas, had he been a Papist, he would probably have had a Priest about him at the last.

*Shep.* That would have spoiled all he had been doing; and there was no occasion for the assistance of a Priest, since one plenary indulgence or dispensation was sufficient to sanctify, and render meritorious, not only all his libertine labours, but all the crimes of his flagitious life, which were in some sort necessary to exemplify and recommend his writings, as they again were, to serve the purposes of Popery.

*Temp.* After all, does it not seem a very odd conduct in a Papist, to rivet in the minds of men such notions and principles, as cannot but oppose, in the strongest manner, the re-admission of Popery?

*Shep.* The several species of Fanaticism, that have long prevailed in this country, are, to the full, as opposite to Popery, as Deism itself can be; and yet it is notorious, that legions of Jesuits have been employed in raising and fomenting the spirit of Fanaticism, when that spirit promised fairer than all things else, to ruin the Church of *England*. No emissary of *Rome* could be so stupid, as to think of serving his master's cause among zealous Protestants by canting up any thing that hath the least look of Popery. No, Sir, it must be by instilling principles so opposite to those of the Church of *Rome*, as to parry all suspicion, and yet, in order to subvert the established religion of our country, as opposite to that too. As it is almost impossible for any man to divest himself wholly of religion, a Deist, who makes the nearest advances to absolute Atheism, retaining notwithstanding, in spite of himself, some faint sense of religion,

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is the most likely of all men to turn Papist, at least when Death approaches; for after a life agreeable to his dissolute principles, no religion on earth, but Popery, can afford him any relief in the midst of his fears about the possibility of a future account. This the Jesuits know full well, and therefore must be sensible, that the propagation of Deism conduces more, than that of Enthusiasm, or any other extravagancy, capable of being introduced into a Protestant country, to the advancement of Popery, which is not only qualified, as I have observed, to follow Deism, but even knows how to find a place in the mind of an actual Deist.

*Temp.* Is it possible, that any man in his senses can be at the same time both a Papist, and a Deist?

*Shep.* Some men among us, distinguished for their great abilities, have divided themselves between these opposites; keeping the one for practice, the other for profession; the one to live in, the other to die with.

*Temp.* It is not difficult to guess whom you mean.

*Shep.* Whether they, who propagated Deism among us, were Papists or not, it is certain, that in case a Papist were to undertake that office, he must build on no other plan than theirs, if he proposed the introduction of Popery in consequence to that of Deism. To illustrate this, give me leave to point out two or three of the most distinguished methods, followed by our Libertine Apostles in the good work they are pursuing. In the first place, *Tindal* in his *Rights of the Christian Church*, and the authors of the *Independent Whig*, altho' they set out with fine compliments to the Clerical order, yet afterwards endeavour to prove, there is no such order among us, distinct from, and independent of, the State. They represent us, as constituted, and almost as ordained, by Act of Parliament. When, in pursuit of *Hobbes's* scheme, they insist, that the Clergy ought always to be the creatures of the civil power, they serve no other cause than that of Deism, or rather Atheism; for as often as the civil power is lodged in the hands of a Pagan, there can be no Ministry to preach Christianity, nor to administer its sacraments, unless we can suppose, that a Pagan Emperor or King will be at the trouble of constituting  
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and ordaining a Ministry for the destruction of Paganism. On this footing Christianity could never have been introduced into the world. But when they erect this battery particularly against the Church of *England*, they cannot, consistently with reason, have any thing else in view, than to serve the Church of *Rome*, from whence they borrow, *verbatim*, all they say on the subject.

*Temp.* It is very true. The Papists, ever since the Act of Supremacy, have been endeavouring to put us out of humour with our Church, as a creature of the state, subsisting only on a Lay constitution. And pray, is it not so in fact?

*Shep.* The upper order of the Clergy is elected by the King; the lower orders, by the Bishops: but this hath nothing to do with the question; for all the orders are consecrated and ordained only by the Clergy. The purely spiritual powers, such as ordaining, preaching, administering the sacraments, &c. run only in the chanel of the Clergy. As to the few temporal powers, with which our Church is vested, they belong to the State, and are exercised by permission, and in subordination to the State. When Deists, Papists, or Dissenters, object this subordination to us, we know very well what they mean; but those of our own Church, who are taught by them to do the same, can neither make themselves intelligible to others, nor do they know what they say, or what they would be at. All they have to urge is, that one independent government within another must occasion confusion, and tend to the destruction of both; and so, no doubt they will, if they are of the same kind. But as in our constitution they are of different kinds, the one purely temporal, and the other purely spiritual, they mutually aid each other, and can never clash.

*Temp.* Your distinction wholly removes the difficulty; and as the Deists could not be ignorant of that distinction, their upbraiding the Church of *England* with its subjection to the civil power, hath, I own, the appearance of a design to serve the cause of Popery.

*Shep.* In the next place, the Deists attack the Scriptures with Popish arguments only, proving those sacred writings to be an insufficient foundation for religion, a



defective rule of faith and practice. Admit this point, Sir, and you are equally prepared to build, either on the oral tradition, and infallible interpretation, of Popery, or on the natural light of Deism. But if you hold by the Scriptures, altho' you cannot be a Deist, yet neither can you be a Papist. The only chance therefore, of your being gained by the Popish party, rests intirely on your regarding the Scriptures as insufficient.

*Temp.* No Jesuit, if he were to put on the mask of a Deist, could by any other method better serve the cause of his Church, than by thus undermining the credit of Holy Writ.

*Shep.* Another method, by which our Deistical writers serve the interests of Popery, is more refined and subtil than even this. They attack Christianity on Protestant principles, such as liberty of conscience, private judgment, and a right to propagate our own persuasions. These, which many of our Divines have pushed, to the full, as far as they can with any shew of reason be carried, the Deists scrue up to an extreme destructive of all authority and institution. If a Papist were to argue with us, he could not more effectually promote the cause of Popery, than to run us into Deism on our own principles, or force us to defend ourselves with such weapons, as were employed all along by the Church of *Rome* against the Reformation. It is further worth observing, that *Tindal*, and the other Deists, as if they had a mind to acquit Popery of giving any open to Deism, borrow all the quotations, on which they build it, intirely from Protestant Divines, never once casting the odium of their own principles on Popish writers, by drawing favourable passages from their works, and wresting them to the purposes of Deism. By these means it comes to pass, that they only refute the Christianity of Protestants, not that of Papists, which they leave, with all its arguments, untouched, unanswered, and, as far as their silence can screen it, unsuspected.

*Temp.* I cannot see, how the Deists, if they were all in reality Papists, could keep better measures with the Church of *Rome*.

*Shep.*

*Shep.* Were it not that this conversation hath been too prolix already, I could give you a competent number of instances, in which the principles of Deism and Popery discover a surprising alliance. Their objections to the Scriptures, as hath been already noted, are precisely the same. Their indulgence of vice answers the same end. The purgatory of the Deists differs not from that of the Papists, only in its extent: for the Deists say, all punishments are inflicted by God, as well for the good of the sufferer, as of others; and therefore conclude, they will be merely purgative and temporary.

*Temp.* You have, I must confess, given your conjecture no small appearance of probability; but how is this to be reconciled with all the bitter invectives, and sarcastic jests, thrown out in the Deistical writings against Popery?

*Shep.* If the Authors were Papists, a small clause in their dispensations might sufficiently provide for such a liberty, which was necessary to conceal their real design, and mask themselves. Besides, their jests could do no great harm to Popery, against which they sometimes rail indeed, but never argue. However, Sir, you might have observed, they never level at the Church of *Rome*, but when it is, thro' a supposed sameness or resemblance, to wound that of *England*, which they can't so decently attack by name.

*Temp.* This also is very observable. New fashions I find in religion, as well as in cloaths, or rather new improvements on the old, are manufactured abroad, and varied to the taste of a people more immediately subject to the changeable dominion of the moon than any other nation, and indeed, than all other things, except the tides. The new opinion, and the new cuff, of the year, are imported with the same wind.

*Shep.* **B**Y this time, Sir, I believe you have enough of a conversation, that turns on topics so very foreign to the thoughts of a young Gentleman. Your disposition to forsake a way of thinking most opposite to my own, and, if I mistake not, more dangerous to  
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yourself,

yourself, than any other you could have had the misfortune to fall into, hath encouraged me to be too tedious and talkative; for which I have no other apology to make, but that of assuring you, from an heart which knows not how to dissemble, that I was prompted to run out into such lengths, only by a sincere affection and zeal for your happiness.

*Temp.* I cannot tell, whether your conversation, or the motive that gave birth to it, afforded me the greater pleasure. I regard your acquaintance, Mr. *Shepherd*, as the greatest blessing of my life; and with good reason; for you have been the means, under God, of restoring me to the use of my senses, and my understanding, and, in so doing, to the dignity of my nature, from whence I had unhappily lapsed into blindness and brutality.

*Shep.* I bless God, whose wisdom and power can make even me, unworthy and contemptible as I am, the instrument of so much good.

*Temp.* And I have too much reason to be thankful for his compassion, shewn to me thro' you, not to make his servant taste the effects of that gratitude, which I cannot, at present, otherwise so well manifest to his Master. Mr. *Dechaine* and his Chaplain have taken great offence, not only at your freedom, but your principles; insomuch that measures are already considered of, to distress you in your present situation.

*Shep.* His will be done, for whose service I esteem it a small matter to suffer all that Deism itself can dictate. Am I then to have the honour of a Confessor, who think myself unworthy to stand among the meanest of his servants?

*Temp.* You are indeed to have the honour and merit, but not the suffering: that, if you will give me leave, I intend to provide against. Your tenderness for me hath made a man your enemy, who is too powerful for you to cope with. I should therefore give but an ill account of the principles you have revived in me, should I leave you dependent on his *benewolence*, which he intends to shew you by all imaginable mortifications, those being, as he says, on your own principles, the chief ingredients  
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in that discipline, which is necessary to train you to a true Christian humility. No tenant hereafter is to make you a single present; and not only your little ecclesiastical income, but your lease too, is to be disputed at law. You will pardon me, Sir, if I say, I rejoice at this, because it throws you into my hands, and leaves you no room to decline the offer I am going to make you. If you will remove to my seat, you shall have an handsome apartment, and somewhat more by year, than the profits both of your lease and parish.

*Shep.* I was always awkward at acknowledgements; but your goodness, on this occasion, so confounds me, that I know not what to say.

*Temp.* I enter a caveat against all acknowledgements. Will you go with me? Will you consent to be my friend, and to improve on the good foundation you have laid in me?

*Shep.* I am absolutely the most unfit man in the world to live in a great family. I know nothing of ceremony and politeness, and am too old to learn. Besides, the frequent indispositions, brought on me by age and trouble, would make it extremely inconvenient, both to my dear Patron and myself, to take up my abode in his house. The relation, who manages my little farm, and my other affairs for me, who comes between me, and all worldly occasions of vexation, is also the only man on earth who can comfort me in my illnesses.

*Temp.* I begin to feel a selfish uneasiness at hearing you are sickly; because for the future I shall suffer a share of every evil that afflicts you, and, on every attack of your disorder, shall be under apprehensions of losing a second father.

*Shep.* Your goodness does more honour to Christianity, than all that is said for it in the apologies of Divines.

*Temp.* It is more in regard to your satisfaction than my own, that I will propose another scheme to you, better suited to your inclinations, and state of health. On the farther side of my gardens, which are pretty extensive, stands a neat farm-house, with convenient offices, orchards, &c. To this I can annex a little parcel of grounds,



grounds, and a small annuity, on which you, your relation, and two or three servants, may be as happy, as ease, innocence, and retirement, can make you. I will furnish the house, stock the farm, and provide it with all the necessary implements of husbandry. There is a door, opening out of my gardens into the fields I intend for you, to which you shall have a key, and another to my library, where you will find about three thousand volumes, collected by my father and grandfather, who were men of learning and taste. These you may use at your discretion, either in the library, or at your own house.

*Shep.* You open to me the most pleasing prospect that a well-disposed mind can possibly entertain itself with in this world. But with what face could I accept of so much for nothing?

*Temp.* Do not mistake me. You have already paid the fine for this little tenure, which notwithstanding, I intend to lett you at a very great rent. Somewhat more than an equivalent for them must come in to me, my family, and my other tenants. You shall be my almoner, and adviser in every thing. Your conversation is to be my chief entertainment; your exhortations and reproofs, my guides to happiness; and, that I may not too selfishly confine your talents and piety to my own use, you shall preach, visit the sick and poor, and do the other duties of a Clergyman, as often as you please. Our poor sorry Parson will be pleased to get an assistant, without a salary. This I tender, Sir, as an offering to God, and as the first-fruits of my return to him from principles odious in his sight, and a life of folly.

*Shep.* Undoubtedly he accepts of it as such, altho' I cannot, without offending him, desert a post that is now become of more importance than formerly, when there was no one to corrupt the principles of my flock.

*Temp.* As all you can wish for, is the power of doing good, will you not be able to do more in my neighbourhood, when aided by my fortune and influence, than here, opposed by those of Mr. Dechaine?

*Shep.*

*Shep.* God only knows, and to him I submit the event. I love my hitherto good and innocent people, and cannot desert them in the midst of the danger they are threatened with, either thro' dread of the persecution I am to suffer at the hands of one Gentleman, or thro' the desire of a'l those worldly comforts that are proposed to me by another. I am, however, in extreme anxiety, lest you, dear Sir, should imagine, the refusal of your most generous offer proceeds from the smallest distrust of your constancy, or the most remote apprehension of your grudging the bounty, great as it is, which you have tendered.

*Temp.* I am fully persuaded, your soul is incapable of such a thought. Altho' it grieves me, that I cannot more closely unite you to me, yet I dare not further dispute the justness of your resolution, which hath something in it, that appears awful and sacred to me. But I hope, after sharing thus, by my resignation, in your sufferings, you will grant me what I am going to ask.

*Shep.* You can hardly ask any thing of me, which, considering what hath passed between us, you are not fully intitled to receive.

*Temp.* In the first place then, I ask your friendship, and every testimony that can be given of it, in your closet, in your letters, and by your visits to my house, as often as you can be spared from your duty here. In the next place, you must give me leave, in case I cannot soften Mr. *Dechaine*, who wants neither compassion nor good-nature, nor prevail on him to lay aside a resentment so unworthy of a Gentleman, to make, out of my superfluity, some small provision against the distresses of my friend, and his relation.

*Shep.* As to my friendship, and the utmost demonstrations I can give of it, if I can commute them for yours, I shall make a most advantageous exchange. And as to your kind intentions to relieve me, in case I should be distressed, the rules of friendship will not suffer me to lay a disobliging bar against them. However, I must insist, that my relation and I being the best judges of our own wants, you shall do nothing, till he points out the proper season for that purpose.

*Temp.*

*Temp.* This latter condition is a little hard; but due regard shall be had to your modesty, as well as your necessities. My dear and worthy friend, farewell.

*Shep.* Farewel, good Sir; and, that you may be always happy, stand fast in the faith; quit you like a man; be strong. Stand fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

### The End of the Eighth DIALOGUE.

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